

SOME MEMORABLE YESTERDAYS
OR
Men, Women & Events of Indian History

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FOREWORD

The reader of this volume would no doubt wonder about its lack of design. Why are the earlier centuries almost unrepresented? Why so many notable absentees—Asoka and Chandragupta Maurya among others? I must record in explanation that the book is entirely composed of material at hand in the shape of newspaper clippings. It is, mainly a selection from a series of sketches which I contributed to the *Hindu* of Madras as a weekly feature, under the general caption "This Week in Indian History." Each sketch, as the caption implies, was hung on to a specific date. Many vivid personalities who could not be fixed to a date in the uncleared mists of the ancient ages had to be left out of the picture.

A second, freshly written volume may in future—if the reader so wishes—balance this deficiency. Meanwhile, design apart, could not these glimpses of the colourful parade of history be enjoyed for their dramatic content and human value?

B. B.

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MEN

Gautama Buddha

"In the prime of my youth, O disciples, a black-haired lad passing into manhood, against the will of my sorrowing parents I sheared off hair and beard, and put on yellow robes and went forth from home, vowed to the wandering life."

He was the Prince of Kapilavastu, a land of beauty with the Himalayas for background. Twenty-five hundred years ago, he was born of *Kshatriya* parents, in a pleasure grove of *sal* trees called the Lumbini, and there stands on the site to-day an Asoka pillar with the inscription: "Here the Exalted One was born." The boy was called Siddhartha, Desire Accomplished. His family name was Gotama.

Spoilt by his doting father, the child lived in great luxury. When he grew up he married a lovely maiden, Gopa, whom he chose out of five hundred princesses. He read the *Vedas*, learned statecraft and archery. He had all the material to build up a happy life.

Yet he could not be centred in himself. He was restless, torn in the spirit. His keen eyes looked around and saw a world breathing in misery. It was a time when human suffering evoked no tears. Hearts were stone. The penal laws were unbearably cruel. Even petty theft was punished with mutilation ; the hands and legs or the nose

and ears of an offender could be cut off ; he could be thrown into boiling oil ; impaled ; torn to pieces by hounds. Something screamed out in Siddhartha against the frequent glimpse of pain, and the question took shape: "Where is release from misery?"

The story is well-known of the sight of old age, disease and death on the streets of Kapilavastu, drawing Siddhartha on to the path of renunciation. That legend, perhaps, does not refer to particular events, but sums up a general mental process. The receptive mind was in agitated revolt, for the eyes had pierced through the painted veil of life and seen the reality.

On a night of full moon he awoke and made his great decision. "Saddle my horse, Kanthaka," he ordered his servants and stepped to his wife's chamber. Scented oil was burning in a chalice of gold. The bed was fragrant with *mallika* blossoms. The Princess Gopa lay asleep with her new-born child, Rahula. "Farewell, farewell," said Siddhartha, and dragged himself away.

As he galloped out of the city the tempter Mara appeared before him (so the legend goes) and spoke thus: "Do not go. On the seventh day from now the jewel wheel of Empire will appear, which you will rule. Turn back." Siddhartha paid no heed, and Mara threatened him: "Whenever you have a bad thought I shall know." And like his shadow Mara followed him.

He cut his long hair with his sword, discarded all his ornaments and wandered away to Rajgriha where dwelt Alara Kalama, an ascetic of renown. The holy man could not satisfy the young seeker. Turning away, he wandered till he found a delightful spot on the bank of the Niranjana (the modern Phalgu). "Here, thought I, is a pleasant and fitting place for mental effort."

Then he plunged into torturous asceticism. He reduced his food to as much as the hollowed palm could hold. Later, as the *Buddha*, he spoke of this life to his disciples: "Like wasted withered reeds became all my limbs, like a camel's hoof my hips, like a wavy rope my backbone. . . As in a deep well the water gleam far below is scarcely to be seen, so in my eye-sockets the gleam of my eyeballs, far sunken, well-nigh disappeared; and as a severed gourd uncooked and left out in the sun becomes rotten and shrunken, so hollow and shrunken became the skin of my head. . . The hair rotten at the roots, came away in my hands."

He tortured his body for six terrible years, and then realised that this old prevailing way was not the path to Enlightenment: he had been simply "trying to tie the air into knots." He took food, regained strength, and sought knowledge by sinking his mind into the deathlike trance of *samadhi*. He seemed defeated, far from his goal, in utter despair. Suddenly one day the grim struggle drew to a close.

On that historic day he sat down under the bo-tree, cross-legged and upright. with the vow: "Though skin, nerves and bones should waste away, and life-blood itself be dried up, here sit I till I attain Enlightenment." In the hour of twilight the long-striven goal was reached. Knowledge arose within him, and his heart was freed from desire and ignorance. In all the world he alone was the *Buddha*-Enlightened. In sheer joy he uttered a song of triumph described as one of the greatest hymns in all religious literature:

"Many a house of life
Hath held me—seeking ever him who wrought
These prisons of the senses, sorrow-fraught ;
Sore was my ceaseless strife!

But now,

Thou builder of this tabernacle—
Thou!

I know thee! Never shalt thou build again
These walls of pain,
Nor raise the roof-tree of deceits. nor lay
Fresh rafters on the clay ;
Broken thy house is, and the ridge-pole split :
Delusion fashioned it!

Safe pass I thence deliverance to obtain."

(Sir Edwin Arnold's translation)

Yet, Buddha had won half the battle. The great task ahead was to bring his knowledge to the service of the masses. Would the world heed

his words? Reaching Benares, he delivered his first sermon on the Noble Eightfold Path leading to peace. The second sermon stressed the need of detachment from the world's affairs as the means to freedom. The third, delivered on a mountain-side near Gaya, and known as the Fire Sermon, was one of his most famous utterances. While Buddha sat with his disciples, a jungle nearby caught fire. The Master was strangely moved and burst forth: "All things, oh mendicants, are aflame, the eye is aflame, forms are aflame, impressions received by the eye are aflame; and all sensations that arise from these impressions received through the eye are aflame. And what is the flame? It is the flame of desire and anger, of infatuation, birth, old age, death, mourning, despair; all are set on fire with this flame." Thus the words rolled on, the words of fire!

With what vigour of style he delivered his sermons! His logic was remorseless, his similes struck home. He spoke not a word on God. He never appealed to the emotions. He preached the non-existence of the soul, a bold revolutionary doctrine. His system was a code of conduct, *dharma*, a stern inner discipline.

He sent out his first sixty converts on a missionary tour. Men accepted the new teaching "as a clean cloth absorbs the dye." To the masses Buddha spoke only on the need of right living,

the Eightfold Path. Only to a chosen few he spoke of *Nirvana*. Kings and nobles and warriors bent their knees before the Master and accepted the Faith. Also, peasants and artisans and men of low caste. The new religion, though accepted by the higher classes, was at heart a classless movement. It was not anti-Brahmin, but it ridiculed Brahmin claims to supremacy and declared the brotherhood of all.

For a few years Buddha travelled, preaching and founding monasteries, and then he settled down at Sravasti. And half a century passed by.

The success of Buddha's teaching did not go unchallenged. There were repeated attempts on his life. But his magnetic personality, his lovely voice, his tenderness and quiet dignity had created an unparalleled impression. Godless though he was, no man was more godlike: none more lovable. But now his work was over. The *sangha* he had founded was strong enough to carry Buddhism to far Asian lands. At the age of seventy-nine he lay dying in the village of Kusinara. Serene in death as in life, he spoke his last words to the assembled, grief-stricken monks: "Now, oh Bhikshus, I take leave of you. All things that have form are transient. Work with diligence for the goal of *Nirvana*."

Alexander the Great

He was a youth of twenty when he wore the crown of Macedon. His father Philip had been unscrupulous, almost brutal, very fond of wine and song and yet a stern ruler and a man of action. From him the youth had inherited an iron constitution and reckless courage. His mother Olympias had been devoted since her girlhood to the cult of the Unseen. Often she went to the mountain-side and performed strange rites, whirling in a stormy dance, beating the timbrel, and shouting in ecstasy till a mystic communion was reached. From her Alexander inherited a mystic bent of mind, and vivid imagination. She confided to him that he was not the son of King Philip, but of the god Ammon. He believed her. It was his destiny, he felt, to stand above his fellow-men, to see them prostrate at his feet, to perform deeds of valour surpassing even the great heroes of old.

On the day this youth was born, his father's troops won a great victory. What was hardly less important, his father's racehorse secured a prize at the Olympian games. All the omens agreed that the child was to be favoured by destiny. They were right. The child grew up to be the first Asiatic conqueror. He passed into history as Alexander the Great.

His childhood days were moulded by the stern hand of his tutor Leonidas, who taught him to take hard exercise and simple food, and despise luxury and ease. One of his favourite sayings was: "The best appetiser for breakfast is a night march; the best appetiser for dinner is a light breakfast." Initiated into a rough hardy life, the boy became controlled and disciplined. Then at the age of thirteen he came under the far more subtle influence of a new tutor. This was the great Aristotle, who gave him a philosophy of life and filled his mind with an insatiable curiosity, a desire for knowledge and a love of discovery. Further, he convinced him of the universal brotherhood of man. "My father gave me life," Alexander once said, "but Aristotle taught me how to live."

In his sixteenth year Alexander acted as Regent of Macedonia during his father's absence on an expedition. Two years later he won a battle which thrust Greece completely under Macedonian heels. Then, on a day of festivity Philip fell under an assassin's hand, a dagger in his heart. His crown descended on the youthful Prince of twenty.

It was a crown of thorns; and that is why Alexander loved it. For him was not the ease and splendour of an eventless life. Austerity was the key-note of his character.

He was at this time dignified in appearance, well-built, muscular. He was handsome, though not according to contemporary Greek ideals. He had a clear skin, broad forehead, sensitive mouth. His eyes, large but fiery, drew attention at once. A portrait bust brought from Alexandria and preserved in the British Museum shows the eyes sunk deep beneath unusually prominent brows and shaded by very full lids.

He yearned for heroic deeds, and for the sight of strange lands. He was curious about foreign faces, lands. He was curious about foreign Born in a snobbish, arrogant civilization, his ideas were in advance of even Aristotle's, and boldly he rejected the prevailing distinctions between "Hellene", his own culture, and "Barbarian", the culture of the Asian world.

But this did not prevent him from starting out, only two years after his accession, on the conquest of Asia! Alexander, son of the god Zeus, regarded himself as the rightful ruler of the Eastern world. His quarrel was not with Asian peoples and cultures. He was out to pull down kings to their knees. Alexander was more advanced than most other aggressive conquerors in one respect: he had no haughty attitude towards the peoples whom he subdued. He never plundered them. Besides, it was an age when pacifism was unknown, and war was a

medium of self-expression for vital, restless minds. It was the best passport to glory.

He had already, during the brief space of his rule, subdued a pretender to the throne, crushed a revolt of the Greeks (stirred by the great orator Demosthenes), and subjugated the barbarous tribes of the north as far as the Danube. Now he launched out on a great adventure. With an army of 30,000 foot and 4,500 horse he attacked the Persian Empire, two hundred years old, the greatest empire that the world had yet seen.

In a great battle he smashed Darius, Emperor of the Persians. Then the command rang again: "Forward!" In the depth of winter the troops marched through frost and snow, over gorges and precipices, facing guerilla bands of mountaineers, obeying their youthful leader with entire confidence. There followed the conquest of Pamphylia, of Phrygia, of Angora and Syria.

In the ancient town of Gordia there was on exhibition a complicated knot, tied on a rope of bark. A prophecy said that whoever untied it should be Lord of Asia. Alexander did not attempt to untie it. He cut the knot with a thrust of his sword. That was his attitude towards life. In his eventful career he thrust his sword over many a Gordian knot of tangled problems.

There was a brief interview in Egypt where he consulted oracles on his scheme of world-conquest.

Satisfied with the answers, he faced east, stormed through Baktria and Samarkand, and hurled his columns on the hills of Afghanistan.

He was now at the height of his power. But the Empire had spoilt him to a great extent. He had given up his simple mode of living, and assumed pomp and splendour. He was full of self-exaltation, fond of flattery, intolerant of advice, despising restraint, abandoning himself to fits of violent passion, arrogant, despotic. He had built a vast citadel of power. But he had destroyed much in blood and in peace and was himself spiritually destroyed.

In 326 B.C. Alexander was marching down the Indus valley on the most daring of all his adventures. Hitherto, he had fought uncivilised tribes (with the exception of Persia). Now in a strange new world he was at grips with a higher civilisation.

Reaching the Indus he amused himself for a while hunting a herd of escaped war-elephants. Beyond the river lay the territories of the King of Taxila who had already tendered his submission and invited Alexander to his capital. Taxila was famous in Buddha's time as a great University town. To-day it is a mass of ruins, mile upon mile of buried glory in the Rawalpindi district.

Crossing the river by means of a bridge of boats he entered Taxila amidst a splendid reception.

This is the first instance in history of a foreign Emperor being entertained by an Indian king whose power he had challenged. The great city should have wept in humiliation; instead, it was gay with banquets. Ceremonies were held, lavish presents were given and received.

While Alexander was holding a durbar at Taxila, many rajas of the surrounding country came to pay him homage. But there was one who neither came, nor paid homage through messengers. When invited to Taxila he replied that he would meet the conqueror not in conference but in battle.

The plains of the Punjab were sweltering with heat. Alexander marched out of Taxila to punish the Hindu King who challenged him. The two armies soon faced each other from opposite shores of the Jhelum. Porus had 35,000 soldiers and two hundred war-elephants. Alexander had roughly the same number of his own troops and 5,000 allies from Taxila.

The invader's great problem was, how to cross the river in safety. Day and night Porus was alert. At last Alexander hit on a strategic move. He made a number of feigned attacks. Trumpets crashed: words of command rang out: cavalry filed down to the bank and boats full of soldiers were put out on the river. Porus, ready for battle, lined the bank with his war-elephants. But suddenly the Macedonians returned, leaving the

Hindu King disappointed. While this went on Alexander reconnoitred the surrounding country and found a bend of the river where his troops might, with some luck, cross unobserved. Boats were secretly sent there, and one day, while Porus was kept occupied, Alexander marched upstream with 15,000 of his best troops. It was a dark stormy night, heavy with rain. The river was in flood. Loaded with soldiers the flotilla of boats were almost invisible as they crossed.

It was only when the Macedonians had been landed in safety and marshalled up in formation that Porus received the news. Quickly he moved his troops to give battle.

Two hundred elephants came striding like moving rocks. On the tallest of them sat Porus, himself "six cubits and a span" in height, an extraordinary stature. Porus towered above his men. His helmet gleamed in the sun. Alexander watched him and remarked, "I see at last a danger that matches my courage. It is at once with wild beasts and men of uncommon mettle that the contest now lies."

For eight hours the two armies were at grips. Porus had relied on his huge elephants. But the swift-moving Macedonian horsemen wrought havoc with their formidable, long pikes till at last the beasts turned round, mad with fear, hurled down their *mahouts* and trampled over the Hindu troops.

At last the brave army of Porus was no more: 22,000 of them lay dead. Others fled away. The elephants wandered about, sad and sullen. But Porus fought on. All hope was lost; but the wounded King still towered high on his elephant, a clear target for the enemy.

Alexander was deeply impressed. He ordered that no harm should be done to the person of Porus. At his request the King of Taxila went forward and entreated him to surrender. Porus, almost swooning from loss of blood, recognised the man and gathered his last strength. "Traitor!" he hissed and prepared to smite him with a javelin. The King of Taxila fled.

But even for this unfriendly act Alexander was not angry with Porus. He sent messenger after messenger. At last, overpowered by thirst Porus dismounted, and allowed himself to be conducted to Alexander. The great invader rode forward to meet him. Reining in his horse he beheld with admiration the handsome person and majestic stature of Porus. He saw with wonder that the Hindu King was unbroken in spirit, advancing in complete self-possession. "Then Alexander who was the first to speak" (I am quoting from the Greek chronicler Arrian) "requested" Porus to say how he wished to be treated. Porus said in reply, 'Treat me, O Alexander! as befits a king.' And Alexander, pleased with his answer, replied, 'For mine own sake, O Porus! thou shalt be so treated,

but in thine own behalf ask for whatever boon thou pleasest.' To this Porus replied that in what he had asked everything was included. Alexander was more delighted than ever with this rejoinder, and not only appointed Porus to govern his own Indians, but added to his original territory another of still greater extent.

Timur

"India," said a hook-nosed chief, "is a land of sudden heat, not like our heat, but one that saps vitality and breeds sickness. There, the water is bad. The Hindus speak a strange tongue. What would happen if the Tartar army had to linger there too long?"

Greybeards nodded their heads in assent. Even a youthful amir, grandson of Timur, said: "It will be no easy task to subdue India. India has many defences—the broad rivers; the deserts and forests. The soldiers clad in armour; the mighty elephants who seize horse and rider with the trunk and hurl them in the air."

"India is the treasure-house of Asia," said the firm voice of the Lord of Samarkand, who had conquered almost half the world. "And there the Tartars shall march."

He put on a light chain armour, placed a black-and-gold helmet on his head, girdled a scimitar above his hips, fastened a shield on his left arm. Limping, he mounted his horse. He was long-limbed, broad-shouldered, with thick, wide lips and slow, dark piercing eyes. "He had a massive head, a high forehead," wrote Ibn Arabshah, a contemporary chronicler. "He was as remarkable for his physical strength as for his courage. His

skin was white. He had stalwart limbs, the shoulders large, the fingers powerful. His beard was long. He limped with the right leg, and had a deep voice. In middle age his spirit was as firm and his body as vigorous, and his soul as daring as in the past—like enduring rock. He disliked lying and jesting. He carried for device upon his seal two Persian words, *Rasti Rousti*, that is, Strength is in right. He was very taciturn in conversation."

His name was Timur, meaning iron. His foot having been wounded by an arrow, which lamed him, he became known as Timur-i-lang, Timur the Limper. He rose from the ranks of the nameless, and, by his power of leadership, stormed his way into history. The King of England congratulated him on his victories. The French King sent words of eulogy to "the most victorious and serene prince, Thamur." The Emperor of Greece solicited his help. Timur-i-lang became a legend. He fired the imagination of poets. The first play to be composed in English verse was, "Tamburlaine, the Great."

He stands third, in succession, in the gallery of world-conquerors. The first was Alexander of Macedon. The second, Genghis Khan, the Mongol. Timur was a Tartar who smashed the Mongols and brought Asia under the heels of his own clan. Later in life he married a Mongol Princess. His descendants, among whom were the

Mughals of India, carried the blood of Asia's two great Terrors.

His younger days were passed in the little town of Sali Sarai in hunting and horsemanship and long rides. and in crossing swords with raiders of other clans. His fearlessness won him the favour of the Mongol King who appointed him Commander of Ten Thousand. But the Mongols were ruining the Tartar country. The ghost of Genghis Khan the Cruel had arisen. Timur protested. Angrily the Mongol Khan ordered him to be put to death. Timur heard, mounted his horse. and rode away with a few followers into the desert.

For six years he was a wanderer, flying from camp to camp, always fighting, and making a name for himself as a warrior. In a land where reckless courage was the rule, Timur's utter disregard of his own safety was no exception. Boldest among the bold, he possessed every gift that thrusts a man from the depths to the peak, and lays on his brow the mantle of leadership.

When he raised the Horsetail Standard, Tartars from far and near flocked to him. These men were the material with which Timur forged a thunder and laid the ground for a new empire.

Within the space of six years most of the Tartar chieftains had paid homage to the outlawed wanderer. At the age of 34, he was undisputed Lord of Turan. He had taken Samarkand, and restored the old, broken capital to the height of

splendour. But his moments were too precious to be spent in the peaceful mulberry groves of the "Blue City." Asia was yet to be conquered, and after Asia, Europe. With bated breath the men of Samarkand listened to tales of their Lord's westward march along the Khorasan Road, past Nishapur, down to the Caspian Sea, or else up the northern steppes into Mongol land.

The Mongol empire had stretched from Jerusalem to India. Luxury had enervated the chiefs, and the empire had crumbled. Timur, by 1375, had snatched away three-quarters of the old Mongol dominion. But the "Golden Horde" still remained to be conquered. They were nomad clans, slant-eyed, thin-bearded, always on the move, living in tents on the snow-swept grassland, ever at war on Europe's borders. Russia was under their heels. In Eastern Europe they held the balance of power. One of their Khans had married the Greek Emperor's daughter, and raided into the heart of Poland. While Timur was hacking his way to the throne, the Golden Horde was at the peak of its glory.

Timur was engaged in a campaign against Persia when, one day, a messenger galloped into his camp. He had come from Samarkand, covering nine hundred miles in seven days, and was reeling in the saddle. His voice trembled as he gave the message: the Khan Toktamish had

invaded Tartarland and was within striking distance of Samarkand.

Never before had Timur marched so swiftly. He overtook the enemy. At his approach Toktamish retreated into the steppes. But it was clear that he would come again. A grim challenge had been thrust by the descendant of Genghis Khan. Central Asia, stretching away for thousands of miles on every side, was far too small to contain more than one ambitious monarch. Timur must give up his career of conquest and stand guard on Turan for fear of Toktamish. But he was the last man to accept such a condition. "I will destroy the Golden Horde," he said, and issued his orders. The Tartar army was staggered, for the orders were to ride north into the trackless steppes and meet Toktamish in his own snow country.

Forward into the wastes of Asia beyond the Caucasus valleys! Through storm and snow, into the bleak White Sands. Across mountains. The prairies seemed endless like the sea. Food was scarce, and the hundred thousand horsemen were half-starved. Extermination seemed at hand. But such was the discipline of Timur's troops that without a word of murmur they filed along behind their leader's Horse-tail Standard into the Valley of Death. And in the trackless, uninhabited wastes they were lost. It appeared that in vain was the Amir of Samarkand searching for the

elusive Golden Horde. They had vanished without a clue. Yet it was certain that the invisible enemy was watching every step of the Tartars with a hundred thousand eyes!

Thrilling adventures followed, stranger even than those Napoleon was to know, centuries later, on his march to Moscow. At last Timur's journey of 1,800 miles was ended. He was facing the Golden Horde!

Then came the panther-spring. The Horde was twice as numerous as the Tartar. Their Horned Standard seemed to growl at the Horsetail. The Golden Horde was in the heat of battle when Timur brought forward the helmeted guards in his reserve, and before their fierce charge the Horned Standard broke and fell.

The Mongol Empire was now dead, and over the sprawling carcass the Conqueror marched to Moscow. Here he built two pyramidal towers out of severed heads cemented with clay. The feat was to be repeated later in Persia, India and elsewhere.

The struggle for Empire was carried on year after year. Baghdad, the capital of the Caliphs, fell in ruins. The splendour that was Damascus became one great mass of flames. Persia was broken-backed. Then the Conqueror led his hundred thousand horsemen into the plains of Hindusthan.

He smashed the Afghan tribes that stood in his way and pressed into the Land of Five Rivers amid a carnival of destruction. Defied by a Rajput fortress he stormed it and slew 10,000 men. He gutted Multan so thoroughly that "not even a cat or a mouse remained alive in the city." Then he advanced on Delhi where Sultan Mahmud was awaiting him with 50,000 soldiers, supported by 125 war elephants, clad in chain armour, poisoned blades fastened to their tusks.

At this time his soldiers had more than 100,000 prisoners. Timur decided on the eve of the battle that these should be made "food for the sword." "I gave my command for the *Tawachis* to proclaim throughout the camp that every man who had prisoners was to put them to death, and whoever neglected to do so should himself be executed." The skulls of the slain were material with which a pyramid was built, lighted at night by a beacon fire.

Forward the horsemen rushed in a headlong charge, with their battle-cry of "*Dar u gar!*"—"Hold and slay." The war elephants were driven back with "iron claws" and flame-throwers. Sultan Mahmud fled to the mountains.

There followed the sack of Delhi. "All my army, no longer under control, rushed to the city and thought of nothing but killing, plundering, and making prisoners."

After a fortnight's rest Timur resumed his large-scale massacre. But he did not stay long in India. Fighting his way through the Sivalik Hills, the "Scourge of God" passed out of the country, fired by visions of new lands for conquest: the great Empire of Turkey spreading well within the borders of Europe: and the equally great Empire of China.

Muhammad Tughlak

"This King loves to dispense gifts and shed blood. His gateway is never free from a beggar and a corpse," wrote a Muslim chronicler. "He is, indeed, the humblest of men, loving justice and truth. He strictly observes the rules of the Faith. Strong in him is generosity. And no less strong is cruelty."

Generosity, with a vengeance! Muhammad Tughlak sat in the Hall of Thousand Columns, smiling his welcome to strangers from far and near: poets, scholars, mendicants, as well as alien adventurers. "Take whatever you need," he cried to the supplicants, assigning to each the revenue of a village or even a whole district, or a large amount of cash. The supplicants were sated beyond their dreams. Never was a monarch so far-famed for his benevolence. And not benevolence alone. No king of the time possessed such exceptional talents and such vast learning. Muhammad Tughlak was well-versed in philosophy, astronomy, Aristotelian logic, mathematics, physical sciences and the Persian language. He was unsurpassed in composition and calligraphy. He had a clear intellect, vivid imagination, elegant tastes (his beautiful coinage is a delight to the eye), extraordinary memory, and an aptitude for making

his mind a store-house of knowledge. A lover of fine arts, he wrote poetry. He even studied medicine and was successful in curing diseases! A true Muslim, he was never a bigot. No intolerance was shown to non-Muslims during his rule. His only interference with Hindu religious customs was his attempt to suppress *Sati*, and in this matter of reform he preceded Akbar and William Bentinck.

Yet, strange to relate, this highly cultured man of scholarly habits and artistic bent was one of the most cruel men of the time. Scores of culprits stood every day under the beautifully painted wooden roof of the Hall of Thousand Columns, hands tied to their neck, feet bound together. The Sultan ordered some of them to be released after torture, others to be executed. The victims preferred death to torture! The bodies of the killed were kept exposed at the palace gates for three days. It rarely happened that a corpse was not seen there.

A common form of execution was, trampling under the feet of trained elephants. Ibn Batuta, the Moorish traveller, who was warmly received by the Delhi Monarch and presented with jagirs, describes it thus: "These elephants have their tusks covered with sharp irons which have knife-like edges. The driver mounts his elephant, and when a person is thrown in front the animal seizes him with its trunk, hurls the struggling body in

the air and catches it back on the tusks. Then the elephant tramples upon the body."

Muhammad Tughlak's father had been a kind-hearted ruler, loved by his subjects, and on him the poet Amir Khusrau bestowed this eulogy :

"He never did anything devoid of wisdom and sense,

He might be said to wear a hundred philosophers' caps under his crown."

One day he was returning in triumph from a military expedition. His son and heir Prince Juna came out six miles from Delhi and erected a pavillion for the Sultan's reception. Trumpets blared. Smiling courtiers moved with pleasant grace. Suddenly, there was a deafening roar. The roof of the pavillion had come toppling down! Sultan Ghiyasuddin lay crushed in the wreck. Was this an accident, or a deliberate murder? The finger of accusation points at Prince Juna, who had ordered the hasty and needless construction. Prince Juna was the only one to profit by the old man's death. He ascended the throne of Delhi, soon after, as Muhammad Tughlak.

He started his rule in circumstances that were all in his favour. His father had left the kingdom in excellent order. The treasury was full of money. The Prince himself had earned a reputation as a great soldier, and a man of temperate habits in his private life. It seemed that all would

be well. Muhammad Tughlak would steer over calm waters.

At first he fulfilled the hopes of his people. Early in his reign, his kingdom was more extensive than that of his Muslim predecessors. Not even Alauddin could boast of such splendour and achievement. Yet, at the end of his twenty-six years' rule, the Empire was falling apart. Bengal and the Deccan had declared their independence. But the shrinkage was not in territory alone. Hindusthan was drained of money. The finances were ruined. Famine stalked over the land. And above all, there was the ghastly shadow of imperial wrath, murderous, gathering its victims by the thousand!

"It was a tragedy of high intentions self-defeated," Lane-Poole puts it briefly. Muhammad Tughlak, with all his splendid mental equipment, lacked one essential quality: sense of proportion; in other words, a balanced mind. This destroyed him, and his kingdom. His excellent ideas came to naught. His knowledge became a useless burden. He tried to do good to his subjects and emptied his treasury over them, and yet earned their undying hatred. His efforts were vast, and so were his failures. He was one of the greatest and most unsuccessful kings of the Middle Ages.

His thoughtless liberality and extravagance drained the treasury and compelled new taxation. The peasants of Oudh were the victims of fiscal

tyranny. But it was a bad year. The peasants were reduced to beggary. "We slave on the soil and then starve. The Sultan takes all. What good is this tillage?" At last the desperate men set fire to their stacks, turned the cattle loose, and departed to the jungles.

Muhammad Tughlak was mad with rage. He surrounded the jungles with his troops, slowly closed in as though he were tiger-hunting, and massacred the helpless refugees in cold blood. Every man caught was killed, and the severed head was exhibited on the town wall. And the same man-hunter, strangely enough, devised an excellent system of Government loans for the peasants whom he so brutally oppressed.

His scheme of transferring the capital from Delhi to Devagiri (renamed Daulatabad) is an example of his unbalanced mind. The project itself was not fantastic. The Empire was spreading into the Deccan. Hindusthan was drained of money, so that the financial centre of gravity was shifting South. The Sultan's Deccan provinces stretched to the river Godavari. The Maharatta town Devagiri was well-situated and deserved to be a capital.

But Muhammad Tughlak ordered the complete evacuation of Delhi! The people were to abandon their homes. They must carry their belongings and make a journey of 700 miles to the new city. It was a preposterous idea, strictly enforced. Finding

the citizens hesitant, the Sultan ordered that no one must be found in Delhi after three days.

At the end of the appointed time two men were found in the city—one paralytic, the other blind. The paralytic was shot, and the blind man dragged along the road. His limbs fell in pieces during the journey, and only a blood-soaked leg reached the new capital.

Delhi was a premier city of Asia, stretching ten miles across, with splendid palaces, and enclosed by a great wall which astonished the traveller Ibn Batuta by its thickness and skilful defence arrangements. One evening the Sultan climbed up to the "glittering gold tiles" of his palace-top and cast his eyes over the city which showed no gleam of light, no fire, not a whisp of smoke. "Now my heart is satisfied," he murmured.

To transplant the entire population of a vast city was a mad project. The broken-hearted citizens trudged wearily for forty days, many dying on the way. They came to the new capital only to starve. Daulatabad became the graveyard of Delhi. With bitterness and fury the Sultan saw the failure of his pet scheme. But he was wise enough to recognise his failure. "Back to Delhi!" came the order.

Yet the Sultan had acted all this while with his usual open-handed generosity. He had paid the citizens for the old houses they had left behind. He had built an excellent road to Daulatabad, with

inns and rest-houses. When the lean survivors returned to Delhi, for six months he distributed daily rations of food to all who needed them.

The Sultan's extravagance, along with his abolition of all land taxes as a measure of famine relief, hit the finances hard. What remedy was there? The Sultan dived into his vast knowledge, pondered, and planned a new monetary system that could meet the heavy pressure on the Treasury. He would issue a token currency. The copper token would pass at the value of the silver *Tanka*. The idea in itself was excellent. Clearly, the Sultan was an expert on currency questions. But, then, he was the wisest fool in India! While he followed a scientific theory, he forgot a simple matter that no other man would have overlooked. The new coinage could succeed on the presumption that none but the State would issue the tokens. In those days, however, there was no milling or any other exclusive device to distinguish the issues of the State mint from private forgeries. Any skilled engraver could copy the Persian inscriptions and make his own copper coins which would be valued as silver. The contemporary chronicler Ziauddin Barani writes: "The promulgation of this edict turned the house of every Hindu into a mint, and the Hindus of many provinces coined lacs of copper coins. With these they paid their taxes and purchased horses, arms and fine things of all kinds. So low did the copper coins fall

after a time that they were not valued more than pebbles. When trade was interrupted on every side, the Sultan repealed his edict, and in great wrath proclaimed that whoever possessed copper coins should bring them to the Treasury and receive old ones in exchange. Thousands of men who possessed these coins brought loads of them to the Treasury and received in exchange gold and silver *Tankas*. The discarded copper tokens rose at Tughlakhabad like a mountain."

There seemed to be no end to the Sultan's schemes. He assembled a vast army to conquer Persia. The army stood idle awhile, then broke up. The project of invading China led to a costly expedition which came to a disastrous end in the Himalayan Passes.

Many revolts took place during this rule. They were brutally suppressed. The Sultan's rebellious nephew was skinned alive. His flesh was cooked with rice and presented to his wife and children! The skin was stuffed with straw and exhibited throughout the country. When the thing reached Sind the Governor, supported by the Kazi, had it buried. The Sultan was mad with anger. He ordered the Governor to be executed, and the Kazi to be flayed alive!

But no amount of barbarity could hold the Pathan nobles in check. While the Sultan fought them in one province, others rose in revolt a thousand miles away. The desperate Sultan

secured the blessings of the Caliph of Cairo, and welcomed to Delhi a beggarly descendant of the Caliphs of Baghdad, humbly bowing his head to the holy one's feet.

His end was sudden. He ate some fish after the Muharram fast. The fish did not agree with him. He fell ill and caught a fatal fever.

He is perhaps the strangest figure in Indian annals. The student of history gets baffled in the attempt to estimate his character, and calls him a mixture of contradictions. He is, indeed, a fit study not for the historian alone but the psychologist.

Akbar's "Universal Faith"

"Truth!" sighed the Emperor. "Where is Truth?"

The House of Worship was full of uproar. A hundred men lifted their voices in fury. A short while before they had been debating calmly and with reason. But the mask of dignity had slipped off. A hundred holy men—Muslims, Hindus, Parsees, Jains, Jesuits—claimed with passionate words, each for his own Faith, a monopoly of true knowledge. Akbar, the Emperor, listened, but no longer felt amused. He used to like the discussions. They were food for thought. The Emperor had built the House of Worship and called in the learned theologians so that he could find Truth. But having presided over the debates for a year, dissatisfied, fretful, he asked himself: "Where is Truth?"

Even at the tender age of fourteen he had known this feverish mood. A great melancholy had often settled on him. In this state of mind he had hated worldly affairs, and the self-seeking of soulless men. Impatiently, one day,—so the tale goes—he rode his horse, Hairan, galloping away, unattended, into a desert. There, he dismounted and communed with God. Hairan, the Iraqi horse, slunk off, leaving him all alone. A

strange ecstasy took hold of the youth. In a while he came to himself, and looking about saw no sign of his horse, nothing but hot grey sand stretching to the far horizon. The silence was intense. As he stood, perplexed on account of his horse, he saw the galloping form of Hairan in the distance. Presently it came up, smooth coat shining in the sun. Akbar rode back.

This mystic communion with some unseen force was repeated, many years later, when religious debates in the House of Worship were in full progress. A great hunt had been ordered in the Punjab, with fifty thousand bearers taking part. The game within a ring of some forty miles was driven in to the slaughter. Suddenly the Emperor ordered the hunt to be stopped. Not a shot was to be fired. The animals would be left in peace. What had happened to Akbar? Abul-Fazl, who was Akbar's best friend, hides the explanation in rhetoric. The Emperor, we are told, was "lifting the skirt of his genius from earthly pomp A sublime joy took possession of his bodily frame. The knowledge of God cast its light on him." The author of *Tabakat-i-Akbari* tells us briefly that Akbar saw a vision. Badaoni is equally vague. He says: "All at once a strange frenzy came upon the Emperor, an extraordinary change was seen in his manners. Everyone attributes it to one cause or another, but God alone knows secrets.

Take care! for the grace of God comes suddenly,
It comes suddenly, it comes to the mind of the
wise!"

Abul-Fazl describes what happened later. "The spiritual world seized his holy form and gave it a new beauty. . . . What the Sufi seers had searched for in vain, was revealed to him. The spectators who were in his holy neighbourhood carried away a part of the divine gift."

The moments of exaltation had brought about a new sympathy for the animal world, and the great hunter gave up the game for the time.

This mystic temperament, stirred by the spirit of inquiry, had caused learned men of many Faiths to be brought together under one roof. As Abul-Fazl expresses it: "The Shahin-shah's court became the home of inquirers of the seven climes and the assemblage of the wise of every religion and sect."

The debates only made Akbar more and more dissatisfied. For a while it seemed as though he would turn Christian. Father Aquaviva, the Jesuit leader, hoped to baptize the Emperor, who treated the Bible with reverence, had pictures of Christ and the Virgin copied by his artists, attended Church ceremonies, and gave the Jesuits full liberty to preach and make converts.

Then, again, he leaned towards Hinduism. From his earliest youth he had, in compliance with

the wishes of his Hindu wives, burned the sacrificial fire (*hom*) in his palace. Under the influence of his beloved courtier, Birbal, he began to worship the sun at early dawn, muttering holy words, face reverently turned eastward. On the New-Year Festival of the twenty-fifth year of his reign, he prostrated himself before the sun in public. He appeared at the *Diwan-i-Am* with his forehead marked in the Hindu manner, and had jewelled strings tied to his wrist by Brahmins as a blessing. The nobles imitated him, and the *Rakhi* custom became current in the Mughal Court.

The Parsees interested the Emperor, and from them he learnt to worship fire. A sacred fire, never to be extinguished, was lit in the palace according to Parsee rites. Dastur Meherjee Rana, an eminent theologian, taught the Emperor the mysteries of Zoroastrianism.

Finally, Jainism cast its influence on Akbar. The Jain preacher, Hiravijaya, came walking a thousand miles to meet the Emperor. Akbar gave him the title of *Jagad-guru* (World-teacher), and obeying his instructions, released prisoners and caged birds, and prohibited the killing of animals on certain days. A few years later, the preacher starved himself to death in the approved Jain manner.

So the Great Mughal in his search of God planted his feet on four divergent paths. Presiding over the debates in his Parliament of Religions.

discussing with *sadhus*, *fakirs*, *padrees*, and other holy men, he came to the conclusion that there was no Faith that could boast of absolute, indivisible Truth as its monopoly. Each Faith contained some truth, some beauty. It was then that Akbar decided to be a gleaner. He would take a little from every Faith, and build out of this material a new religious system such as the world had not known.

Nor had the world ever known an Emperor-Prophet who was the highest spiritual guide of his people. Akbar would be the first of his kind. The fire of divinity was bright within him (so he claimed), and like all other Prophets he was infallible.

One day he began his challenge of orthodoxy by appearing at the chief mosque in Fathpur-Sikri and preaching from the pulpit. To the usual prayers he added the following verse to emphasize his position as spiritual leader:

"In the name of Him who gave us sovereignty,
Who gave us a wise heart and a strong arm,
Who guided us in equity and justice,
Who put away from our heart all save equity ;
His praise is beyond the range of our thoughts,
Exalted be His Majesty—Allahu Akbar!"

He declared himself the supreme arbiter in all religious matters, and issued the "Infallibility Decree." Even if the leaders of Islam in India

did not at heart approve of this Decree, they signed it. Akbar was triumphant.

Out of the Emperor's dreams of a religion that would solve the communal problem of India and weld the country into a single unit, carved as it were from a single solid rock, there emerged the "Universal Faith."

Akbar summoned a council of theologians and spoke to them of the political difficulties arising from the clash of Faiths. He concluded: "We ought, therefore, to bring them all into one, but in such a fashion that they should be both 'one' and 'all', with the great advantage of not losing what is good in any single religion. Thus honour would be rendered to God, peace would be given to the peoples, and security to the empire."

So the new Faith began. Akbar in his role of *Guru* (spiritual preceptor) personally performed the ceremony of initiation. "The ceremony takes place when the sun is in its highest splendour," wrote Abul-Fazl. "The novice, with his turban in his hands, puts his head on the feet of His Majesty. This is symbolical. It means that the novice has cast off conceit and selfishness, the root of so many evils, and has come to ask how to reach everlasting life. His Majesty, the chosen one of God, then stretches out the hand of favour, lifts up the suppliant, and replaces the turban on his head, meaning that he has raised up a man of pure

intentions and made him a member of the Universal Faith."

The Universal Faith was doomed to failure. It was too vague. It did not satisfy man's spiritual hunger. Besides, a religion preached from the Throne could never appeal to the masses; and Akbar, with all his force of personality, lacked the genius of a Prophet. The Universal Faith designed to unite all India and perhaps all mankind did not spread beyond the narrow circle of Akbar's friends and courtiers, and quickly died away.

Yet Akbar's great ideal of religious toleration, not only preached but practised, has immortalized him for all time. He stands out, like Asoka, as one of the most significant figures in Indian history.

The year 1942, it may be recalled with interest, is memorable for the four hundredth birth anniversary of this great Mughal Emperor.

Rana Partap

The history of Rajasthan is a history of one long struggle to preserve independence. An ideal shone like a star: Rajasthan free from alien rule. The struggle to uphold the ideal brought forth strange qualities of the mind—unbending courage; fearlessness, and the power to laugh at the ugly face of doom; a thirst for doing the impossible. The cult of heroism went to such lengths that it almost became an end in itself, not the means to an end. The Rajput struggle was lifted to a high level by means of brave, wonderful deeds. But such deeds often hurt the country rather than helped it. There was a great wastage of man-power.

Towering in the gallery of herces who lent colour and romance to the Rajput name stands Partap Singh. In him was re-born the indomitable spirit of his ancestor, Sanga, the famous opponent of Babar. He was born of a cowardly father. Udai Singh had been weak, worthless, timid. When the Mughals marched on Chitor, Udai Singh fled to the Aravalli hills. Four years after his humiliation Udai Singh died, leaving twenty-five sons. On his death-bed he nominated his favourite son Jugmal as his successor.

It was the spring month of Phalgun. A full moon shone in the sky. Trumpets sounded.

Heralds cried, "May the King live for ever." Jugmal was attired for coronation. But he never sat on the throne. The great Rajput chiefs Jhalora Rao and others discussed the injustice that was being done to the eldest-born Partap Singh, and came to a decision. Jugmal had entered the darbar. Partap Singh was saddling his horse for departure. Two chiefs took Jugmal's hands and with gentle violence removed him to a seat in front of the throne. One of them, who was the hereditary prime-minister, remarked: "You made a mistake. Maharaj: that place belongs to your brother." Then he girt Partap Singh with the regal sword, and thrice touching the ground hailed him King. The other chiefs followed the example. Scarcely were the ceremonies over when Partap Singh cried out: "To horse. Let us slay a boar to the goddess Gauri." That day, hunting in the Aravalli jungles, the Rajput nobles knew that once more they had a great leader, and they hoped for a revival of the lost glory of Mewar.

Partap succeeded to the renown of a great family, one that had pre-eminence in all Rajasthan. But he also inherited the burden of many defeats, blighted hopes, an empty treasury, a throne of brass that did not even glitter!

Recovery of Chitor! That was at the core of all his dreams. Thus would he vindicate the honour of a family that had precedence over all others in Rajasthan. Chitor was like a widow,

Rana himself? Prince Umta said that he could not attend owing to a headache. Man Singh replied: "Tell the Rana I know the cause of his headache: but the error is irremediable, and if he refuses to put a plate before me, who will?" The Rana sent back a frank answer. He regretted that he could not eat with a Rajput who had given his sister to a Toork. Man Singh's face reddened at the insult. He left the meal untouched. As he was about to depart, Partap appeared. Man Singh addressed him: "It was to preserve your honour that we sacrificed our own, and gave our sisters and daughters to a Toork: but abide in peril, if such be your resolve, for this country shall not hold you. If I do not humble your pride, my name is not Man Singh." Partap replied quietly that he would always be happy to meet him. A voice, less dignified, blurted out: "Don't forget to bring your aunt Akbar with you."

When Man Singh left, the ground on which the feast had been spread was broken up and purified with Ganges water. The Rajput nobles, suffering from a sense of pollution, bathed and changed their clothes. The discarded feast on the bank of Udi Sagar hastened the date of Partap's great battle.

He started by remodelling his government on more efficient lines. Kamalmir, now the capital, was strengthened. Fortresses were built on the

mountains. The people were mobilised for a long-drawn-out campaign.

Meanwhile, Man Singh was marching. A great army had been sent by Akbar under the Rajput's sole command. Partap came forward with twenty-two thousand Rajput troops. The two armies met at Haldighat, overshadowed by the neck of a mountain. All around lay steep rock and forest, valley and stream. Ahead was a pass, between two perpendicular mountains, hardly wide enough for two carriages abreast. Above and below stood the Rajput ranks. On the cliffs and pinnacles stood their faithful allies, the aboriginal Bhils armed with bow and arrow, and huge boulders ready to be rolled down upon the enemy.

The armies dashed into action. *Alla ho Akbar!* shouted the Mughals. *Hara Hara Bom Bom!* cried Partap's men. And *Hara Hara Bom Bom* resounded from the Mughal ranks too. Man Singh was commanding not only Mughals, but his own Rajputs as well. On the field of Haldighat Partap Singh had to fight his own countrymen. Even his brother Sakta had deserted him and joined the enemy.

A crimson banner flew over his head as he plunged into the battle-field. He strove hard to encounter Man Singh, but that man avoided him. He almost deprived Akbar of his heir. Hacking his way through the guards he advanced on his

horse Chaitak and appeared before the Mughal Prince, Salim. His lance rose fiercely towards the Mughal Prince. Rajput paintings have depicted the incident. Chaitak stands gallantly with one foot raised against Salim's elephant, while Partap's lance is aimed on the enemy. The mahout was killed. But the elephant turned and carried Salim off. A fearful slaughter took place at this spot. The Mughals desperately defending their Prince, the Rajputs defending their leader. The "golden sun" of the *Rajachatra* (royal umbrella) blazed over the head of Partap, marking him out clearly as the Rana of Mewar, but he would not lay it aside. The Mughals hurled their weapons at him. He had already received seven wounds from spear, shot and sword. Thrice was he rescued, but at last he was almost overwhelmed. At this moment there took place a deed of heroic sacrifice that will live for ever in Rajput history. Manah, the chief of Jhala, seized the royal umbrella and lifted it on his own head, drawing the fury of the enemy towards him. In this breathing-space Partap was forced to withdraw from the field. Fighting, the chief of Jhala fell. He had rescued his master at the cost of his own life!

Fifteen thousand Rajputs fell in that fateful battle. Valour was useless against an incomparably superior enemy, supported by field artillery. Partap Singh retired from the battle, heart-broken, riding on Chaitak, closely pursued by two Mughal

chiefs. Suddenly he was stopped by a mountain stream. The Mughals were galloping hard. What would Chaitak do at this critical moment, fatigued as he was after a hard day's work? Chaitak hesitated for an instant. He quivered under his master's insistent touch, breathed hard, gathered all his strength and leapt the stream.

But Chaitak like his master was bleeding from wounds. The Mughal pursuers were gaining upon them. Hope was dying in Partap's heart. Then he heard the broad accents of his native tongue. "*Ho, nila ghora ka sawar!*" (Ho, rider of the blue horse!) He looked back, and saw the galloping form of his brother, his brother Sakta, the traitor.

But Sakta's heart had changed. From the Mughal camp he had seen Partap riding the "blue horse", all unattended. A strange feeling had surged up in him. What peerless courage Partap Singh exhibited—what defiance of death! The thought of other days came upon him. He remembered their childhood. And he rushed to the back of his horse. In a while he overtook Partap's pursuers and killed them with his lance.

He knelt before his heroic brother, and begged to be forgiven. Partap took him in his arms. Suddenly, a cry of anguish broke through his lips. Sakta followed his eyes, and he cried out too. Chaitak, the blue horse, had sunk on the ground. In a little while he was dead.

Partap Singh would not exchange honour for safety. All his life he had to pay for his rare patriotism. Defeat followed defeat, he was hunted from place to place, but he carried on a relentless guerilla warfare, determined to struggle on till death. Even while the Mughals thought that he had been crushed finally, never again to raise his head, he assembled his bands by mountain signals and suddenly pounced on the enemy.

But he was worried about his family. Often they were on the point of being captured. Once they were saved by the faithful Bhils who put them in wicker baskets and carried them to a hiding-place in tin mines. Partap's children were often concealed in baskets and hung up on the branches of trees to preserve them from beasts of prey.

There were times when his starving family so wrenched his heart that he almost made his submission to Akbar. He saw his wife reduced to a skeleton. He saw his children crying for food. But he steeled his heart and carried on his struggle. After many years of terrible suffering he nearly succeeded. Akbar had other things to occupy him. He was tired of a campaign that promised never to end. Partap recovered nearly the whole of Mewar. Only Chitor, Ajmir and Mandalgarh remained in Mughal hands.

His last moments were dramatic as all his life. A groan burst through his lips. A Saloombra chief inquired, "What afflicts Your Majesty's soul that

it will not depart in peace ?” Partap spoke with emotion. “These sheds,” he gasped, pointing at the huts in which he and his family lived. “will give way to big dwellings, thus generating the love of ease : and luxury will come, to which the independence of Mewar, which we have bled to maintain, will be sacrificed ; and you, my chiefs, will follow the example.”

The chiefs, deeply moved, swore by the throne of Bappa Rawul that they would shun all luxury and ease till Mewar had recovered her complete independence. Partap Singh smiled happily, and died in peace.

Khusrau, the ill-starred Prince

Character as well as circumstances worked hand in hand to invest Prince Khusrau with an atmosphere of misery. He was unusually handsome. His engaging manners fascinated all who came in contact with him. He was well-educated, and had intellectual pursuits. But he lacked judgment. He was impulsive and heedless.

A dashing youth of seventeen, Prince Khusrau became the centre of Court intrigues. Akbar's days were now numbered. His health had broken down. Salim, his eldest son, was steeped in scandal and luxury: and, what was worse, Salim defied the aged Emperor and sought to make himself an independent monarch; to spite Akbar he murdered his best friend and companion Abul Fazl in a vile manner. The nobles plotted to set Salim aside and have his son Khusrau nominated for the succession. And Khusrau was willing. He dreamed of the crown. It was indeed a boyish dream. But shrewd men of affairs eagerly fanned his ambition to serve their own political ends. For a time it seemed that Khusrau would be nominated by Akbar to the throne of Delhi. But the bubble burst. Akbar did not set aside the claims of his eldest son, even though he

had been hit by him at a tender spot. The conspiracy failed.

The strife continued. Once in a while the Emperor was swayed by doubts. Might not his son Salim destroy the edifice he had so fondly built? Would not his grandson Khusrau make a worthier successor? He decided to draw an omen from an elephant-fight, his favourite sport. Salim's elephant Giranbar was to combat with Khusrau's Apurva, while Akbar's own Rantamhan would stand as a reserve ready to help the defeated side.

Akbar's mind was set at ease. The omen was in favour of his eldest son's succession. Not long after, he lay in bed waiting for death. Salim bent over his feet. The Emperor signed to his attendants to hand the prince the Imperial insignia of power—turban, robes and dagger.

While Salim ascended the throne with the title of Jahangir Padshah Ghazi, preparations were hurried to take Khusrau away to Bengal. But the flight seemed unnecessary. Jahangir promised his son forgiveness and invited him to audience. Khusrau came. His father kissed him affectionately and presented him with a lakh of rupees. It appeared that the old sores had healed.

But the sores had not healed. They were only hidden for the time being. Jahangir could neither forgive nor even trust his son, and placed him in semi-internment. Khusrau was heart-broken.

As though the shattering of a dream crown was not enough, there was the prospect of a life gone to waste, a life passed in dishonour. Khusrâu was restless. He could not sleep at night. Within him was a black well of melancholy.

He looked out through the window of Agra Fort and saw vast spaces ahead, a star-spangled sky that spoke of freedom, of glory. In that moment Khusrâu made up his mind. Grimly, through his teeth, he muttered: "Forward to action!"

He spoke to his attendants and friends, spoke of a faded dream that lived again. They listened eagerly. How lovely was this youth as he revealed his rainbow vision!

One evening, under the pretext of visiting his grandfather's tomb, he escaped from the Fort. Three hundred and fifty horsemen sworn to fidelity went at his heels. Their numbers grew quickly as they galloped down the dust of the Punjab road. Often they slept under the sky, inquisitive jackals licking their feet. Often they had to force provisions from poor villagers, though this pained the kind-hearted prince.

In a village he met the Sikh Guru, Arjun, whom he had seen before, and begged his help and benediction. "My money is not for princes but for the poor," the Guru said. "I am very poor and friendless, and have not even travelling expenses," cried the Prince. Arjun blessed him and gave him five thousand rupees.

The first battle between the rebels and the royalists took place outside the walls of Lahore city. Khusrau besieged the city, but could not take it. Meanwhile, the Imperial army was rushing ahead in hot pursuit. A lamplighter had noticed Khusrau's flight the same evening and informed the Wazir. The news was quickly conveyed to the Emperor. The military machine of Delhi was at once set in motion. Jahangir himself marched with his army.

On the eve of battle Jahangir attempted reconciliation. His son's undisciplined, poorly-equipped forces were no match for the Delhi army. But Khusrau would rather break than bend. Torrents of rain came down through the black night. In the morning the battle-field was muddy with the downpour. Streams of blood mingled with the clods. It was a short but decisive battle. Khusrau's men lay dead in hundreds. The survivors fled, including the Prince himself, Kabul now being his destination. Twice had his ancestors started out from the hills of Afghanistan and stormed the gates of Hindustan. Khusrau would repeat that history. But the Imperial troops were combing the country in search of him. Every road and ferry was watched. Khusrau and his comrades passed wearily through the dark along the bank of the Chenab river. At one spot they came upon two boats. But the party was at once recognised and a hue and cry was raised. The boatmen

refused to take them across. In vain the rebels implored and threatened. Horsemen were seen galloping up to the river. In a minute all would be lost. Khusrau and his men jumped into the boats and took the oars themselves.

All through the night they plied without skill down the waters of the Chenab. A double line of soldiers were standing on the river banks and scanning the water. The eastern sky was flushed with light. Khusrau's boat stuck aground and would not move.

The captives were brought to Lahore. Jahangir heard the news and burst into tears. Presently he controlled his feelings and proceeded to the Hall of Audience. Prince Khusrau was brought in, handcuffed, a chain on his leg. The Emperor reproached him severely and thrust him into prison.

"To strengthen and confirm my rule," writes Jahangir in his *Memoirs* (he too wrote the history of his life, in imitation of his great-grandfather, Babar), "I directed that a double row of stakes be set up from the garden to the city, and that the rebels should be impaled thereon, and thus receive their deserts in this most excruciating punishment." The order was carried out. Prince Khusrau, seated on an elephant, was led out through two rows of his impaled, writhing followers. He was mockingly asked to accept the homage of his two hundred comrades. No torture could be worse. Khusrau himself was not impaled; but the hor-

rible sight made him feel in imagination all the agony of the punishment.

There were also other varieties of torture. Two of the Prince's chief accomplices were sewn up in the undried skins of an ox and an ass, complete with horns ; and seated on donkeys, face towards the tail, they were paraded through the streets. One of them died of suffocation within twelve hours.

Khusrau lived on in captivity, but life had no interest for him, and once more he became the centre of treasonable conspiracy. The plot was betrayed to the Emperor who ordered reluctantly (he was not without affection) that his rebellious son be blinded. "When the wire was put in his eyes," writes a Muslim chronicler, "such pain was inflicted on him that it is beyond all expression."

Strange as it was, his sufferings turned him into a legendary figure. He was Prince Charming in Chains. All over Hindustan people spoke of him with sympathy and affection. But his sufferings were not yet over. His younger brother, Shah Jahan, feared him as a possible claimant to the throne. By means of intrigues he brought the captive under his power and took him to the Deccan. The event caused great discontent in the country. "The common people all murmur," wrote a contemporary English traveller, "the whole court is in a whisper ; the nobility sad ; the multitude, full of tremor and noise. . . . Women

in the palace mourn, refuse their meat, cry out on the king's dotage and cruelty."

The fears were soon justified. One night a slave of Shah Jahan knocked at Prince Khusrau's door, pretending that he had brought orders for his release. Khusrau did not believe the story. He refused to open the door. But the slave entered the chamber by force. He struck down the helpless Prince, strangled him, and placed the corpse on the bed.

It was proclaimed in the morning that Khusrau had died of colic pains. Thus ended the life of a charming, idealistic, kind-hearted Prince, one of the most pathetic figures in Indian history.

Prince Dara Shuko

“Dara Shuko in his later days did not restrain himself to the free-thinking and heretical notions which he had adopted under the name of Sufism, but showed an inclination for the religion and institutions of the Hindus. He was constantly in the society of Brahmins, Yogis and Sannyasis. He considered their books which they call *Beda* as being the word of God.”

So wrote Mirza Muhammad Kakim in *Alamgir-Nama*, and Dara's own philosophical works that are available show the strange bent of his curiosity-haunted mind. In him was re-born the unbiassed desire for religious knowledge, though not the genius for finding truth, of his great-grandfather, Akbar. Like Akbar he was a Seeker. Unlike him he was not an intellectual. Sincere, studious, learning not with Akbar's dazzling quickness but slowly and steadily, he sat humbly at the feet of the Hindu Yogi, Laldas. And with the same eager humbleness he sought knowledge from the Muslim fakir, Sarmad. To build a bridge between Hinduism and Islam was his aim, and for that purpose he wanted to screen the externals of both, and bring into relief the essentials. That was why he wrote “The Mingling of Two Oceans.” With the help of the great pandits of

Benares, the seat of Sanskrit learning, he translated fifty of the *Upanishads*. Further, he wrote a volume of Lives of Muslim Saints and a book that has been translated into English as *The Compass of Truth*.

Dara Shuko was the eldest son of Shah Jahan, and designated heir to the Delhi throne. The Emperor loved him dearly. Never had a Crown Prince received such honours. He stayed at the capital and assisted his father to rule the great Empire. He had the unique rank of a Commander of Forty Thousand Horse and the title of *Shah-i-buland-iqbal*, King of Lofty Fortune. He even used the Emperor's name and seal. No one in Hindusthan, with the exception of the Emperor, enjoyed such a vast income. (His yearly pay was over two crores of rupees.) Shah Jahan was now past his sixty-seventh year. He was broken in health and the shadow of death seemed close by.

Shah Jahan in his old age was assailed by worries. What would happen after his death? He had himself waded to the throne through a pool of blood. Would his four sons, born of the same mother Mumtaj Mahal, tear each other to pieces for the Empire? That would be in keeping with tradition. Obviously, they hated each other.

So the Emperor had sent away Shuja, Murad and Aurangzib to rule distant provinces where they would be out of touch with the heart of -

Shah Jahan appeared at the *Jharokha* of Agra Fort, so that his subjects might set their doubts at rest. But a strange rumour was spread by whispering tongues: Shah Jahan was dead: a slave who looked like him was impersonating him in imperial attire! Letters signed by Shah Jahan were despatched to the *amirs* as usual, but it was said that they were Dara's forgery.

The three brothers wrote anxious letters to their father. They wanted to see him and find out the truth. They were hastening to the capital out of loving concern. Having seen him they would bide his commands.

So they marched onward. Murad and Aurangzib were acting in concert. Religion gave them a suitable pretext. Murad, weak-kneed, immersed in drinking, posed as the champion of Islam! It was his holy mission to destroy Dara, the Idolater.

The Empire of Hindusthan was to be divided between the two brothers.

But Murad was a useful tool in Aurangzib's hand. Later, when the war of succession had been won, he was a worm to be trampled underfoot. One day his crafty brother asked him to dinner. Himself a teetotaller, he laid drinks before Murad saying: "Drink in my presence as I long to see you supremely happy."

Well-fed, rolling with drink, the prince laid himself down to sleep. There was a clatter. The

Universe. Dara was a hunted fugitive. The pursuing columns pressed on, relentless, driving the Prince from pillar to post.

From Delhi to Lahore; down the line of the Sutlej; across rain-swollen rivers; Multan; zig-zagging in the Indus Valley; a brief interlude in Rajasthan when hopes of Rathore alliance sprang up, only to wither quickly; long weary marches in the dust and heat through waste land; attacked by robbers; at last the dread deserts of Sind.

At this moment Dara remembered a friend. Nine miles east of the Bolan Pass, there lived a Baluchi Chief who had once incurred Shah Jahan's wrath and had been sentenced to be trampled by an elephant. Dara had interceded with the Emperor and saved the man's life. Would not the Baluchi Chief give him shelter out of gratitude?

The story is related by Bernier, a contemporary traveller, that Dara's family was agitated by dismal forebodings, and with tears in their eyes they reasoned with him and tried to prevent him from relying on the Baluchi Chief. But, relates Bernier, "Dara, as if hurried away by his evil genius, could not perceive the force of these arguments, remarking that he did not believe it possible that he should be betrayed by a man bound to him by such strong ties of gratitude."

Soon, he paid a heavy price for his faith in the goodness of human nature. The Baluchi sprang upon him and his family, and put them in chains.

Dara Shuko, the rightful heir to the throne of Delhi, was pushed down the Land of Five Waters, down the Delhi road, a doomed, heart-broken prisoner.

All eyes were turned on Aurangzib. What would he do to this fallen one, his brother? He ordered that Dara Shuko be paraded in chains on the streets of Delhi.

It was necessary to strike the people with terror, to impress them with the irresistible might of Alamgir. So the wretched prisoner was seated on an elephant, his young son at his side. "This was not," writes Bernier. "one of the majestic elephants of Pegu or Ceylon, which Dara had been in the habit of mounting, pompously caparisoned, the harness gilt, and trappings decorated with figured work, and carrying a beautifully painted howdah inlaid with gold. . . . Dara was now seen seated on a miserable and worn out animal covered with filth. He and his son were habited in dirty cloth of the coarsest texture, and his sorry turban was wrapt round with a Kashmere shawl or scarf, resembling that worn by the meanest of the people."

What a dismal procession! The Emperor's brother riding a filthy elephant like a disgraced beggar! But even in this terrible condition Dara retained his nobleness of mind. As he was passing by, a fakir on the road-side shouted out: "O Dara! when you were master you always gave me

alms. To-day I know well that thou hast naught to give me." The Prince replied by drawing off his dingy, dark-coloured shawl, and threw it down to the fakir.

. . .

De Boigne

Northern India in the second half of the 18th century was the dreamland of alien military adventurers. The wreck of Aurangzib's empire lay tumbled. Military power was divided between the Afghan Chiefs, the Rajputs, the Jats, the Mah-rattas. These flew at each other's throat, ceaselessly, with furious aim. Anarchy was the settled order of the day. In the heat of this struggle for existence the rival rulers of Hindusthan were disposed to buy the help of European soldiers. About the middle of the century the Nawab of Bengal, the Imperial Court, the Jats of Bharatpur and the Rajput Rajahs had all been served by French or English adventurers who sold their swords to the highest bidder. A few of the aliens rose high in rank. But the majority, men of feeble calibre, fell quick victims to temptation and lost their future prospects in the pursuit of pleasure.

The few who stepped into glory reached their aim by severe self-restraint and discipline. When once firm on the saddle, they moved in pomp and pride, helped to break and make kings and wielded a power about as effective as that of independent sovereigns. Such was Peiron. Such again was George Thomas. But of all the military adventurers who walked proudly over the

Indian stage, none could show genius such as De Boigne's nor boast of his achievement.

The races of Upper India were excellent ore. De Boigne was a master craftsman. In the brief space of a decade, he created his iron battalions, versed in European technique of warfare. They fought always to conquer. They ensured for their maker a unique place in the history of the time.

De Boigne was born in Savoy. His boyhood years were crowded with dreams of glory. His father wanted him to be a lawyer. He refused. For him there was no other profession but that of arms. His departure from home was hastened by a duel with a Sardinian officer, followed by a threat of the law. Ambitious, self-assured, the youth of seventeen crossed the frontiers to France and presented himself to the Irish Brigade, a corps far-famed for discipline and gallantry. His tall thick-set figure, his soldierly bearing and superior confident air were recommendation enough, and he was forthwith given an Ensign's Commission.

It was during service in this Brigade that he evolved his military talent. He watched carefully, gathered knowledge. But his restless spirit grew impatient after some years of service. A subaltern's status and pay were hopelessly inadequate, and there was little chance to fulfil one's ambition.

Then he heard that Russia was enlisting volunteer officers in a war against the Ottoman

But disillusion came rapidly. For a while he lived at Madras, giving lessons in swordsmanship; then he swore allegiance to the British Company of merchant-adventurers and started work as a subaltern in a regiment of Infantry. Soon, he realised his mistake. He, a major in the Russian army, was now the humblest officer in barracks where he shook hands with grey-headed Lieutenants. Promotion was rare. It depended on money and connections, not on merit. He left the Company's service, and set out once more in search of adventure.

He met Warren Hastings at Calcutta. At Lucknow he passed the hot season, studying Persian. He had little money, and no resources to fall upon. "A sword for sale!" he cried proudly, wandering through the rival states of Northern India. He was received with courtesy, but his offer of service was politely declined. It was a bitter experience. Travellers had spoken of the "pagoda tree" which you had only to shake to get a shower of gold. That was a myth! Hindusthan seemed to present even fewer opportunities to a soldier of fortune than France or Russia.

But his worse days were yet to come. Madhoji Sindhia, the strong man of Maharashtra, was then rallying the shattered forces of his race after the disastrous defeat at Panipat. His eyes were fixed on Delhi. And those were piercing black eyes that missed nothing. Anxiously he noted an alien

Chief whom Warren Hastings had described to him as "the coming man" would, perhaps, give him the chance to put his ideas into shape!

Sindhia, who had an instinct for recognising talent, allowed him a free hand. Thus, there emerged the first famous battalions, perfectly disciplined on the parade ground, and trained to a superior method of warfare. The test came when the little battalion encountered Sindhia's bitter enemy, the Rathors of Jodhpur, one of the best fighting races in the Orient, traditionally valiant and fearless. Shouting exultantly, assured of easy victory, the Rathor squadrons rode ahead. Plumed helmets glistened in the sun. Swords and lances glinted. Never before had infantry dared oppose the smashing power of the Marwar cavalry. But De Boigne's battalions stood unperturbed among the rocks as though they too were rock. The General rode in their middle, impassive and fearless. He had formed his troops into a hollow square—a formation which Wellington made famous later, on the field of Waterloo. In the centre of the square were guns hidden from view. The horsemen dashed up. When they were within a few paces, De Boigne gave a word of command, and the front line of his battalions stepped smartly back behind the guns. Hardly had the Rajputs realised the meaning of this movement when a thunderous discharge of grape shot let loose murder in their ranks. They staggered for

a moment and then, reckless, with no thought save of honour, rode to the mouths of the guns. Above the din of battle De Boigne gave a command again. Two thousand muskets emitted a sheet of flame on the Rathor horses!

The Rajputs fell back, and before they had spurred their mounts for a second charge De Boigne's battalions were upon them, emitting their terrible flame. It was a decisive victory, and the victory was the work of a military genius. Yet, soon after, during a temporary lull, De Boigne resigned his command and took up business. He was dismayed at Sindhia's meagre resources, and did not believe that the great Chief could really achieve his ambition. Soon after, Sindhia was fighting against overwhelming odds, formidable combinations of Rajput and Afghan. Any other man would have shrunk from such a trial. But in the hour of trial, Sindhia brought into play the whole strength of his moral greatness. He flung back his enemies. He became the virtual ruler of Hindusthan!

De Boigne, a dissatisfied indigo manufacturer at Lucknow, saw with amazement that the Mahratta Chief had worked wonders. And when an offer came again from Sindhia, eagerly he took up his sword. The Mahratta Chief had yet to consolidate his power. De Boigne's task was to organise Mahratta militarism on European lines.

Out of his strenuous labour there emerged the New Model, compact, steel-like, invincible.

A rare chance had thrown together two men of genius, bent on a single purpose. The result was that Sindhia became the most powerful man in Hindusthan, and next to him was De Boigne, his Commander-in-Chief. The Savoyard had realised his ambition beyond his wildest dreams!

Early in 1794 Madohji Sindhia died, and against the wishes of his successor De Boigne decided to leave India. His health was failing. He felt home-sick. He left Calcutta on board a Danish vessel, taking with him a fortune of £400,000, the reward of nineteen years of adventure in the East.

Then he made the greatest mistake of his life. He saw a pretty girl of sixteen at a concert and was fascinated. This girl, the daughter of a French Marquis, became his wife.

It was an unfortunate marriage. De Boigne had made great conquests, but he failed to win his wife's heart. The lady has left an interesting three-volumed book of memoirs, in which she makes nasty remarks about her husband. "The rapidity with which he (De Boigne) had passed from the lowest rank to the position of Commander-in-Chief and from poverty to vast wealth had never permitted him to acquire any social polish, and the habits of polite society were entirely unknown to him. "He was endowed with the

most disagreeable character that Providence ever granted to man. He wished to arouse dislike as others wished to please. He was anxious to make everyone feel the domination of his great wealth, and he thought that the only way of making an impression was to hurt the feelings of other people."

Unlike Clive and other aliens who had made fortunes in India, General De Boigne spent much of his wealth in charity. Over thirty years of uneventful life still remained to him. But he had no desire to return to the scene of his former glory, and in vain Sindhia wrote him in 1799: "Since it has pleased the Universal Physician to restore you to the blessing of health, and having regard to your bounden duty no more to prolong your stay in Europe, appear before the Presence with all possible despatch . . . without your wisdom the execution of the greatest projects is entirely suspended."

Robert Clive

Robert Clive leaned on the deck railing, and watched a sight of horrible fascination. The sea was a stretch of blue. The sky was full of light, smiling. There was only a breath of wind. Two East Indian ships were passing not far from each other, at a slow pace. Suddenly the peace and security in the air was pierced by a cry of terror. Clive saw the other ship bend perilously and sink! All on board were drowned before the hand of help could even be stretched. A submerged rock had struck, and the ship had gone down like a little toy boat. Nothing remained to show that the ship had been afloat, but some torn timber and masts.

This was Clive's first glimpse of violent death. He was then seventeen years old. The event sank deep in his memory. It made him a fatalist. Death, soon, tried to strike him down too. The ship in which he was sailing ran aground. Luckily it was brought back to deep water, undamaged, but a few days later Clive toppled overboard. "The accident," he wrote to his father, "nigh cost me my life, having tumbled overboard whilst I was standing on the Poop of the Ship, while she was lying at an Anchor on the coast of Brazil, and should certainly have been drowned,

there being a very great Sea and much Wind, if the Captain had not Accidentally met with a Rope and a Bucket tied unto it, which he threw out of the Balcony to me."

The voyage to India took fifteen months to complete. Clive, still in his teens, was going out to Madras as a clerk of the East India Company. He had done badly at school, revealing a stronger inclination for mischief than for study. (His prose with its unnecessary capitals shows his poor learning.) His angry father found him a job and exiled him to a distant land.

It was indeed a severe punishment for the boy of restless temperament to sit at a clerk's desk in a warehouse. His salary was five pounds a year. He was to half-starve on this pittance for five years when he would become a "factor" and receive fifteen pounds a year. Three more years in that capacity, and then at last he would earn the privilege of trading privately. That was the goal, the height of ambition. A factor with a salary of thirty pounds a year could maintain a garden-house staffed by a hundred servants.

Madras had been in British occupation already for a century. It had risen to be a great city with a quarter million people. Of these barely three hundred were Europeans. A lucrative trade was carried on under the shadow of the guns of Fort St. George.

The white merchants proudly walked the streets with lackeys to hold umbrellas shielding their faces from the sun. Or else they rode in palanquins and drove in carriages. They held big dinner parties, and maintained beautiful garden-houses. Once in a while a ship of the Company came with ten or twelve English girls. These soon found husbands in the settlement. The monotony of life was now and then broken by a quarrel followed by a duel.

Life was different for the clerks, among whom was Clive. The boom of a gun from the fort roused them at dawn. They started work at nine and carried on till midday. Then followed a little siesta. Back to the clearing-house at four, if a ship had arrived or was about to depart. The evening was whiled away with drinks and cards. The heat of Madras was oppressive. Millions of flies made life almost unbearable. Standing by the godown doorway one heard the eternal creaking of bullock-carts loaded with spices and silks and muslins. In the centre of the town was a busy, congested bazaar with narrow streets. Here dwelt the race of men who were at once the hope of the East India Company's goods-clerks, and their dread: the money-lenders who helped them to tide over a crisis, but ruined their future by charging them a high interest.

Such was the setting of a life to which Robert Clive was doomed. He had hated school because

of its discipline. But school at Hamel Hampstead had been heaven compared to this. He hated the sight of ledgers. He hated indoor routine and the stuffy air of his work-room. His mounting debts were a burden. Appeals to his father for funds were not often answered. Loneliness held him. "I am not acquainted with one family in the place," he wrote in a letter, "and have not assurance enough to introduce myself without being asked. If the state I am now in will admit of happiness, it must be when I am writing to my friends. Letters surely were first invented for the comfort of such solitary wretches as myself."

One day Clive, who had seen Death strike suddenly like a serpent across the waves of the Atlantic Ocean, resolved to end his own miserable life. Standing in the seclusion of his room he raised a pistol to his forehead and pressed. The trigger clicked, but there was no report. As he was examining the pistol, a fellow clerk walked in. "Fire it through the window," Clive handed him the weapon.

The pistol flashed and barked! Clive listened and was speechless for a while. "It seems that fate is saving me for some purpose," he murmured, bemused.

But where was the adventure that was India? On his outward voyage the youth of seventeen with his squat figure and round face had been

£40,000. He was now given the rank of Captain. This was but the beginning. The stage was set for the coming of a military genius, and Clive certainly was one. No other English soldier in India could have achieved the marvel of holding Arcot with two hundred active men against an army of twelve thousand.

The defence of Arcot was followed by a brilliant victory over the French—a display of manoeuvring skill, boldness, and precise judgement, seldom equalled in British history. The outcome was his appointment as second in Command of the Company's troops. His operation led to the surrender of the French Army before Trichinipoly. The English were now masters of the Arcot country.

He went home for a brief spell, and soon returned. He had just arrived in Madras when news reached that Suraj-ud-daula had captured Calcutta and was bent on ousting the English traders from Bengal. Madras was struck with horror. It was decided to send Clive with a force of 2,400 men to fight the Nawab and restore British trading privileges. This fateful expedition was destined to invest the young officer with the glory of which he had dreamed. It enabled him to pass into history as the architect of the British Empire.

Back in England, he bought the most expensive palaces and surrounded himself with every possible

luxury. He, a "Nabob" from India, was one of the richest men in England. But he had enemies, and they accused him of misappropriation. The question was raised on the floor of Parliament. Clive defended himself with power—"Consider the situation in which victory had placed me. A great Prince was dependent on my pleasure; an opulent city lay at my mercy; its richest bankers bid against each other for my smiles. I walked through vaults which were thrown open to me alone, piled on either side with gold and jewels. By God, Mr. Chairman, at this moment I stand astonished at my own moderation!"

The humiliation he suffered ruined his peace of mind. He was the victim of a dread disease, and took increased doses of opium to relieve his pain. He heard now, as in his younger days in Madras when he had been a petty clerk, the call of the pistol!

This time the weapon barked with fatal precision.

Hyder Ali

"She was born under a malignant star, that girl. The evil gaze of Saturn lies heavy on her. Woe begone, she neither eats nor sleeps. Her beauty looks smeared with ink."

"Alas, she is the only daughter of the Wadeyer, and heiress to the State!"

A group of village women squatted by a tank, their water-pitchers on the stone-steps, bewailing the fate of a young maiden of their race. They hardly noticed the two youths, who stood by, and overheard the talk with amazed interest.

"Who is this beauteous one on whom a terrible lot seems to have befallen?"

The women glared at the strangers. Spies? But the frank, handsome faces impressed them, and presently they took the youths into confidence. The Wadeyer (Lord of thirty villages) of the place was mentally deranged, they informed. Taking advantage of his helpless condition, a neighbouring Chief of an inferior caste had demanded the hand of his daughter. Failure to comply with the proposal would bring about immediate war. Under this threat the unfortunate family of the girl had yielded most reluctantly. Marriage preparations were in full swing. But the bride was

wearing away with melancholy. An ashen pallor had settled on her lovely face.

The youths listened, said a few words in sympathy and went their way, deep in thought. They conferred with each other, and took the road to the Wadeyer's residence. They were brothers, one named Vijaya and the other Krishna—descended from the race of Yadava that was reported to have given birth to Lord Krishna himself. Emigrating South from Vijayanagar in quest of adventure and a living, they had halted by the village tank which was on their way.

They reached the Wadeyer's house, made certain proposals, and were engaged for a few days in some secret activities. The marriage preparations went on uninterrupted. On the appointed day the Chief of Caroogully arrived with his friends. A great banquet was held in their honour. Suddenly a band of armed men sprang upon the guests, their swords aglint. "Slay them, slay all," shouted the voice of Vijaya. Not one of the victims escaped. The retinue posted a little apart was also put to the sword. Led by men of valour, the people of Hadana had risen from their state of cowed submission and asserted themselves! Having despatched the bridegroom's party, Vijaya marched immediately to Caroogully, took the place by surprise and returned in triumph.

The grateful damsel became the willing bride of Vijaya, who took possession of the two prin-

cipalities of Hadana and Caroogully, and founded a dynasty. Such, according to romantic tradition, was the beginning of the Hindu House of Mysore.

Under a succession of warrior Chiefs new territories were conquered. The Raj family removed its residence to Pooragurry, where a fort was constructed, and the name of the place was changed to Maheshasoor, subsequently contracted into Mysore. A golden opportunity for expansion was presented by the collapse of the Vijayanagar Empire.

In 1749 the Mysore army undertook a siege, in course of which a young Muslim volunteer distinguished himself by his bravery and attracted the Commander's attention.

This youth was Hyder Ali, who became later the Terror of the Deccan. He usurped the crown of Mysore. He shook the Nawab of the Carnatic on his throne. He made himself a scourge of England and a supporter of the French in India.

His great-grandfather, a religious man, had emigrated South from the Punjab. His father took up service as a peon, became a *Naik* of twenty peons, and then a Faujdar. He died in battle when Hyder Ali was seven years of age.

When Hyder grew up he entered military service as a volunteer horseman. His courage was rewarded by promotion. His military talents developed rapidly. His ambition began to soar.

He owed his swift rise at Mysore Court to his organising skill and tactics on the battlefield. Each conquest was a step up the ladder of success. But the State had to pay heavily in jagirs for his services. It was not long before Hyder Ali was the most powerful man in Mysore, respected by a few but feared by all. Even the Raja himself was virtually under his control.

The Raja found the situation intolerable. Stirred by the dowager queen, he attempted to free himself from the bondage. An opportunity came when Hyder Ali sent the greater part of his troops to assist the French against the English, keeping only a small retinue. Hyder's trusted servant Khunday Rao was bought over.

One day Hyder Ali woke up to find cannon balls exploding about his camp. Presently a body of state troops fell upon his detachment. Surprised though he was by this unexpected attack, he acted quickly. With a hundred horsemen he jumped into the Cauvery, then in full flood. The animals fought the swirling waters and carried their masters safely to the opposite shore. Hyder Ali then rode a distance of ninety-eight miles in twenty hours, the first seventy-five on the same horse.

He raised his battle standard. Adventurers flocked round him. With his new regiments Hyder Ali returned to Mysore and routed the State troops. The Raja in fear resigned all authority to his vassal. Hyder assumed the

government with a studied show of reluctance. He was now Raja in all but name.

His next move was to deal with the faithless Khunday Rao. "Forgive the unhappy man," pleaded the ladies of Hyder's family. "He has wiped out his sin with copious tears of repentance."

"Do not fear for him," Hyder Ali assured the ladies smilingly. "Khunday will be treated with as much consideration as a dear little parrot."

He kept his promise to the letter, confining his servant with barbarous callousness in an iron cage and allowing him only milk and rice for food. In that condition Khunday Rao ended his days.

Hyder then bought a title for himself. He paid the Chief, Basalat Jang, three lacs of rupees for the Nawabship of Seera. The assumption of the title pleased his vanity. Now he set forward on a career of conquests, and began to try large stakes on the Deccan Chessboard, with the Maharatta, the English, and the French.

He expanded the kingdom of Mysore in every direction. To stop his triumphant progress the English made an alliance with the Mahrattas, the Nawab of Carnatic, and the Nizam. But bribed by Hyder Ali, the Mahrattas backed away, and the Nizam followed suit. Col. Smith, commanding the English force, found himself in an awkward situation. All the same, he won the battle.

But Hyder Ali was a keen strategist. On the eve of the battle he had sent his son Tipu with

5,000 horsemen to gallop in secrecy to the English settlement of Madras.

The Governor of Madras was having his breakfast in a country-house with some friends. Suddenly a man rushed up shrieking, "Mahrattas! Mahrattas!" Incredulous, the Governor laughed, and assured his friends that it was a false alarm. When the cry was repeated by others, he flew into a rage and said: "I shall stop the rogues with a *chabook* (whip)."

Narrowly he escaped capture. Happily for him there was a small vessel by the garden, and in this he sailed to safety, leaving an unfinished breakfast as booty for the assailants. His flight was so precipitate that he forgot to take his hat and sword!

Madras was then a prosperous town. It contained (I quote a contemporary French chronicler) "great numbers of Europeans of all nations, who have warehouses furnished with the richest products of every country. Among others, there is a large colony of very rich Armenians, possessed of immense riches, and great numbers of Guzeratis, wealthy bankers who deal in pearls, precious stones and coral; in short, this town is one of the richest emporiums in the world."

Standing by the walls of Madras, the troops of Hyder Ali extracted from the Governor a treaty that destroyed the privileged position won by Col. Smith in battle.

Contemporary writers. French and English, have drawn a vivid picture of Hyder. We are told that he was tall and robust in person, his neck long, his shoulders broad. His complexion was fair. Nose prominent. eyes small and sunk, his face gave an impression of terror. But his voice was mellow and musical. He dressed with studied splendour. A hundred cubits of cloth were rolled up in various involutions to make for him a brilliant scarlet turban, almost overshadowing his shoulders. His eyebrows were shaven off.

He was fond of show and parade. On ceremonial occasions a thousand spearmen gorgeously attired went in procession ahead of him, while bards sang his exploits. He was an excellent rider and a skilful swordsman. He was so good a marksman that his shot was scarcely known to miss its mark. Court wrestlers engaged in single combat with tigers in public shows were confident of being saved in a moment of peril by a shot from Hyder Ali.

He is said to have possessed the talent of attending to several matters at once: hearing and answering the report of a spy, dictating to a *Munshi* and giving a variety of instructions to other officials. Yet he could neither read nor write in any language. He severely kept his temper in hand: the occasional outbursts were deliberately designed to create terror. In social life he relaxed into agreeable manners and was even witty, but

otherwise he seemed a man of steel. Often did he pour forth a torrent of abuse in which he excelled. There were in his Court not even half a dozen persons who had not at some time or other been lashed with the *corla* (long whip). It was an usual practice of his servant Abu Mohammad to soothe his master at moments of ill-temper by the sound of a *corla* at the palace gates, and the cries of an innocent sufferer seized casually in the street for this purpose.

Yet this ruthless man was the most tolerant of all Muslim Rulers in India. All religions, he frankly avowed, were equal in the sight of God. He regarded Ranganatha, the great image in the temple of Seringapatam, with much reverence.

Job Charnock

The Englishman had rough, quick manners. He was hard to please. But no other "Agent" of the East India Company was as easily approached. He held his office in the shades of a great *neem* tree, close by the river, smoking a hubble-bubble while he made business transactions with Hindu and Muslim merchants. Well did he know how to strike a bargain for saltpetre and cotton. For thirty-seven years he had served the Honourable Company, and risen to the highest rank in Bengal.

Business closed early in the afternoon. The merchants had to journey home along dangerous roadways. Dense jungles spread away for miles around Sutanuti, the little English settlement on the Ganges. Robbers lay in wait, springing suddenly on lone travellers. Beasts of prey prowled about. The merchants who came to Sutanuti to trade with the Honourable Company moved in a body. Many of them were Hindus. They made pilgrimage to an adjacent village called Kalighat, far-famed for its temple.

The Englishmen who visited India in the days of the Great Mughals were seldom men of note. A few figures stood out. There was Captain Hawkins, a jovial sailor, broad, round-faced, gay.

There was Sir Thomas Roe, with a haughty chin, aloof, dignified, better suited to play the Ambassador on an amateur stage than in life. There was Chaplain Terry, who wrote simple readable accounts of all that he saw. And there was Job Charnock, the man of action.

Among the British Empire-builders in India Charnock seems to stand first in order of time. He was not a man of high talents. But he had courage. He had bull-dog tenacity. He knew what he wanted. As the founder of Sutanuti which with Kalighat developed, later, into Calcutta, he may be said to have laid the first stone of Britain's Indian Empire. The son of a London solicitor, he arrived in Bengal in 1655 when he was about twenty-four years of age. He does not appear to have come with a job, but was taken on soon as a Junior Member of the Council of the Bay (Bengal) on a salary of £20 a year. A memorial from him shows that he intended to resign and return to England unless he was appointed Chief of the Patna factory. He gained that objective, and henceforth the steady furthering of the Honourable Company's interests became the pursuit of his life.

The days at Patna were dull, filled with the smell of saltpetre, without much room for vigorous action. Aurangzib was then ruling India, and the disintegration of the Mughal Empire had not yet started. The Mughals never forgot to treat

Englishmen, who dressed quaintly and came from a fishing island, as inferiors, to be kept in their proper place. Charnock was only a trader.

Then suddenly, one day, romance came his way, romance such as no other European in India had ever known.

Charnock was passing in the outskirts of the town with a few attendants. A crowd attracted his notice. He looked, and presently he heard the grim familiar cry of Brahmins assembled round a corpse and a young woman. *Suttee* was a common enough sight, and in the hardened mind of the Englishman it seldom, if ever, awakened a tremor of sentiment. Curiosity urged him towards the crowd. The men gave him little notice, and remained busily engaged in arranging the wood for the funeral pyre.

Charnock looked at the woman. His eyes widened with surprise and he rubbed them before he looked again. Never had he seen a woman of such exquisite beauty. Her pale melancholy face had a charm and glamour of which one read in books, or dreamed. The contour and the complexion were set to a higher fascination by virtue of an inner conflict of emotions. Sitting by the feet of her dead husband, preparing herself for the horrible torments of the flames, she looked a full-grown youthful woman, yet she was only a girl of fifteen, newly married, rather bewildered by the cruelty of her fate.

Job Charnock stared hard. He tried to divine the thoughts of the girl. Was she deliberately making a sacrifice of herself, or was she the helpless victim of a custom that knew no mercy? A curious desire rose in his mind. He wished that she would look at him! Companioned by a corpse, surrounded by faces that were like death masks, unloved, thrust to a sub-human level, death to her might well seem the only reality. If only she gazed at a face that *lived*!

But she did not. Her eyes wandered, sightlessly. An intellectual coma had seized her. The pyre was about to be lit. The Brahmins came and lifted the corpse. *Haribol!* they shouted, placing it on the pyre, under the canopy of faggots. Now the Brahmins were coming for her. Yet, horror did not leap on her face: the stupor in it only deepened. Standing on the edge of life, she hardly realised where she was.

Job Charnock had stood rooted to the spot. Suddenly on an impulse of the moment, he jerked himself to action, rushed to the girl and took her hands. There fell a terrible silence. For some moments the Brahmins stood aghast. Then their eyes glinted with fire. Like a battle-cry they shouted out: *Haribol!*

But Job Charnock did not see them. He only saw the burst of surprise on a young, beautiful face, its vivid awakening to life, and he had to struggle to calm the fluttering of his heart. As in a dream

he heard her whispered voice: "Why didst thou touch me, *sahib*?"

Then the rage of the Brahmins burst out in a shrilled cry: "She is unfit for the holy flames. The *mleccha* has touched her. the woman is polluted."

Job Charnock sighed in relief. Once more he held her hand. "Come with me." he said. She went. The Brahmins screamed out a menace. Charnock bared his sword, and his attendants bared theirs. Slowly, with drooping head, the woman who had travelled back as it were from the land of the dead followed the Englishman up the Patna road, and passed, as his wife, into the region of romantic history!

When Job Charnock was transferred to Hughly, his life changed. The river carried away the factory, and a new trading site had to be chosen. A three-storied building was set in construction. But when the rooms were ready to be roofed in, the Mughal townsmen complained to the Faujdar that if the Englishmen were allowed to ascend the house-top, the privacy of their own homes would be lost. The Faujdar sent the complaint to the Nawab of Bengal, who issued orders that the construction must be stopped. Masons and carpenters were forbidden to go to the factory house.

Frustrated, Charnock swore vengeance. He burnt the river face of the country as far as Chandan-nagar. (*The Akbar-i-Muhabbat*, which

is my source of information, curiously states that Charnock had a burning glass in his ship, with which he concentrated the sun's rays and set fire to the town). Then he sailed away. The Faujdar tried to stop his vessel. He extended and fastened along the breadth of the river an iron chain, each link of which was ten sirs in weight. "But Mr. Chanak", writes the Mahomedan chronicler, "cut through the chain with a European sword, and went his way." He sailed to Madras.

While he was at Madras, the English won the favour of Aurangzib, and received *farmans* authorising them to build factories in Bengal, and exempting the Honourable Company's ships from customs duties. So, Charnock embarked on the *Princess* with 30 soldiers and landed at Sutanuti which he had explored on two previous occasions. Sutanuti was a low swampy village of scattered fishers' huts—not far from a nest of Portuguese pirates. It grew steadily, till it became the chief town of Bengal and then of India.

Job Charnock passed the rest of his life there. He died of malaria, at the age of sixty-two, and was buried in a simple grave. Later, his son-in-law who became Governor of Bengal, erected a massive mausoleum over it, designed in oriental style, double-domed, octagonal in form. It is probably the earliest example of British masonry in Calcutta.

WOMEN

Padmini

The most celebrated campaigns of Sultan Alauddin were directed against Mewar, the premier state in Rajasthan, ruled by the Sisodias, noblest among nobles. Mountains and belts of dense forest guarded the country from intrusion. No Muslim invader had ever ventured into the region. Alauddin was the first to carry the Muslim banner into the rock-girt fort of Chitor.

The beauty of a woman rather than the lure of gold or glory drew him into this perilous venture. The Queen of Mewar was Padmini. All Hindusthan knew of her, the Lotus Woman, Padmini, the peerless. The Court of Delhi rang with her name. Alauddin resolved to get hold of the fair one.

An immense mass of rock, eight miles in circumference, rose abruptly from the plains. Perched on its crest was the fortress of Chitor. Alauddin came marching, and set up his camp among the foothills. There followed a long siege. "Surrender the Queen," Alauddin demanded; "then I shall molest you no more. Not an inch of Mewar land I want."

The Rajputs laughed with scorn, and in a moment their laugh darkened into a grim scowl. Surrender the Queen! Surrender virtue and

honour and the glory of womanhood, and blacken the Rajput name!

In vain the Sultan stiffened the siege. In vain the catapults hurled boulders of rock at the fortress walls. Tiring, the Sultan sent word: "Let me have one glimpse of your Queen, so celebrated for her beauty, and I shall depart. What harm if you show me her face for a few moments?"

The Rajputs pondered and sent this reply: "The Queen of Mewar will cast her shadow on a mirror. Other mirrors will carry the image ahead. You may enter the fort and see the image."

Alauddin smiled. This would suit him. A dark project was forming in his mind. He would see the image of Padmini, but that was not all!

He knew the Rajput mind. It was incapable of conceiving treachery. He could safely rely on Rajput faith and enter the fort.

Rana Bhim Singh welcomed him with all courtesy. Alauddin entered the palace and saw the queen through a medium of mirrors. His narrow Tartar eyes stared in fascination. The bards who sang of the Lotus Woman had not exaggerated. Padmini had become a legend; but in the flesh she was even more lovely than in the imagined picture of her.

Alauddin rose and took his leave. Bhim Singh escorted him down the rock. To return confidence he accompanied the Sultan to the foot of the fortress, while his guest was pouring forth excuses for the trouble he had caused him.

Some Pathans were in ambush. They dashed forward at a signal, seized Bhim Singh and fled to their camp before the Rajputs had time to recover from their surprise and rush to the rescue.

"Surrender Padmini," came the message from the Sultan of Delhi, "and Bhim Singh will be handed back. Fair exchange."

Chitor was wrapt in gloom. The Rajput chiefs gathered in a council and debated the problem. Padmini had to be surrendered; that was their decision. There was no other way to secure the release of Rana Bhim Singh. Padmini would be safe in the Sultan's camp. A Rajput woman knew well enough how to protect her honour.

"I shall abide by your decision," said Padmini. In the folds of her raiments she hid poison and a dagger. But as she bid farewell to her relatives, young Gora and Badal, they said: "Must you sacrifice your life? Listen, we have a plan." They told her of their plan. The Rana was to be rescued and Padmini also saved.

Word was sent to Alauddin that the Queen of Mewar would surrender herself for her husband's sake. She would go to the Pathan camp in a manner that befitted the Queen, surrounded by

her handmaids, not only those who would accompany her to Delhi, but many others who wished to bid her farewell before she left. *Purdah* was to be strictly maintained.

Alauddin was full of joy. At last Padmini would be in his possession. He accepted the terms.

Seven hundred covered litters proceeded to the Pathan camp. Each litter was borne by six armed soldiers disguised as bearers. In each sat a brave Rajput warrior. The procession reached the Muslim camp where special tents had been erected, enclosed for the sake of privacy with walls of cloth. Half an hour had been granted for a parting interview between Padmini and Bhim Singh.

Like thunder from a cloudless sky the Rajput battle-cry came, "*Hara hara!*" Alauddin jumped up and saw an unexpected sight. Hundreds of Rajput warriors were racing out of the camp, hacking their way through the Pathan guards. The Ranee of Mewar had mounted a fleet horse and emerged at a gallop. Instantly, Alauddin gave his orders. "*Pursue!*"

While Bhim Singh rode away, the Rajputs covered the retreat. They barred the way of the pursuers, and perished, fighting, almost to a man. A fierce battle took place at the gates of the fortress. Both sides suffered heavy losses, but Alauddin was defeated.

Later, Alauddin built up a new army at Delhi and returned to the attack. Chitor had not yet recovered from the hard blow. Resistance weakened. The end was near. Rajput bards have woven a romance out of those days. One night the Rana was anxiously contemplating how to save one of his twelve sons when a voice said, "I am hungry." Looking up in the dim light he saw the majestic form of the guardian goddess of Chitor. "Not satisfied," he asked, "though eight thousand of my kin have been sacrificed to thee?"

"I must have regal victims," was the answer. "Unless twelve of those who may wear the diadem bleed for Chitor, the land will pass from your line. On each day enthrone a prince. For three days let his decrees be supreme. On the fourth day let him fight the foe and meet his fate."

One by one they went, save the favourite son Ajeysi, whom the Rana sent away to a place of safety, so that his line might not become extinct. And instead of his son the Rana himself went to the sacrifice.

Then a terrible rite took place in the fort. A great pyre was lit in a dark, underground retreat. A procession of women, several thousands, led by Padmini, stepped into the cavern. The opening was sealed up.

When Alauddin stormed into the fortress, he saw smoke still issuing from the chamber where Padmini had perished in flames.

Nur Jahan

Mirza Ghiyas Beg was a native of Teheran. His father had held high office, but after the old man's death Ghiyas Beg found it hard to earn a decent living. So he resolved to try his luck in Hindustan, and set out with the caravan of a merchant prince, accompanied by his wife. As he was passing through Kandahar, a daughter was born to him. She was named Mihirunnisa. The father was in such a plight that he could hardly provide for the baby and its mother. But the rich merchant who led the caravan took pity on the family and looked after them. Soon he became friendly with Ghiyas Beg, and on reaching Fatepur Sikri he presented him to the Emperor Akbar. Ghiyas was given a job in the palace. In a short while he proved his worth. By his devotion to work, passion for method, and intelligence, he rose to the office of superintendent of the imperial household.

Mihirunnisa grew up as a lovely, accomplished girl, proficient in music, dancing, painting and poetry. Her father began to seek a suitable match for her. His choice fell on a young Persian named Ali Quli who had worked as a table attendant of the Shah of Persia and had then taken to a life of wandering. Reaching Multan he had

enlisted in the Mughal army, fought in a campaign and distinguished himself. Ghiyas Beg gave him the hand of his daughter. Mihirunnisa was then seventeen years of age.

Ali Quli took office under Prince Salim. When Salim ascended the throne, Ali Quli was granted a jagir in Burdwan, Bengal.

It was, however, soon reported that the seditious spirit of the Afghans in Bengal had affected Ali Quli, and that he was disposed to be rebellious. Kutbuddin, the Governor of the province, suspected him of treacherous designs, and reported upon his conduct to Delhi. The Emperor ordered the man's recall. Thereupon, Kutbuddin proceeded to Burdwan. When Ali Quli came to meet the Governor he was suddenly rounded up by troops. At this treachery he lost his temper and offered resistance. At once he was hacked to pieces. The widow Mihirunnisa and her little daughter Ladili were sent to the Delhi Court where Mirza Ghiyas Beg held high office. Mihirunnisa became a lady-in-waiting of Jahangir's mother. There she remained, unnoticed, for four years. Then, in a fancy fair held to celebrate a New Year's Day, Jahangir chanced to see her and was captivated by her extraordinary charm.

Nur Jahan was already past her thirty-third year. But time had not impaired her beauty. She was queenly in every inch of her being. It was as though she had found the secret of ever-

lasting youth, and had made herself ageless. Jahangir was proud to make her his favourite queen.

She was not simply decorative,—a mere joy to the eye. She had qualities rare in a Mughal palace: a sharp intellect, an iron will. She knew her own mind, knew what she wanted out of life. She could plan with imagination and act with courage. She would mould circumstances rather than be moulded by them. She was highly educated, composed verses and had all the qualities of grace that are considered essential in a young woman. She hunted on horseback and was an excellent shot. Of generosity she had enough. Whenever an orphan girl was married, she sent her a wedding present. She was a friend of the oppressed. A warm, loving friend, but a dangerous enemy. She broke the bonds of the harem and came out of *pardah*. She was practical, resourceful, never unnerved, retaining all her calmness in the face of danger. She was domineering and highly ambitious.

In Mughal India she was the leader of fashion, and not in Mughal India alone. Her patterns of dresses were eagerly copied. She was interested in house decoration, and was skilful in designing gold ornaments, lace and brocade.

Day by day her dignity and influence increased. She was first styled Nur Mahal, Light of the palace, then Nur Jahan, Light of the World. Year

by year her husband allowed her more and more sovereignty, till the whole machinery of administration was in her hands. Jahangir loved an easy, care-free life. Begam Nur Jahan loved excitement, power. She sat at the window and received the nobles. She dictated the Imperial edicts. Her name appeared on the coinage with these words: "By order of the King Jahangir, gold has a hundred splendours added to it by receiving the name of Nur Jahan, the Queen Begam." Jahangir often said that he was entirely satisfied with Nur Jahan's ability to rule wisely. As for himself, "I require nothing beyond a sir of wine and half a sir of meat."

The foreign travellers testify to her complete control over affairs of state. Terry says, "She made such a thorough conquest of his affections that she engrossed all his love and did what she pleased in the government of that Empire." Peter Mundy writes, "He (Jahangir) became her (Nur Jahan's) prisoner by marrying her. She ruled all in ruling him, putting out of the King's favour and receiving whom she pleased."

But the lovely Empress of Hindustan had her defects. She gave the highest posts to her relations. She was too domineering and would not brook the rise of any one else. She would rather be nothing, if not a single, solitary star in the Mughal firmament.

That was how she came into conflict with the great general Mahabat Khan, champion of the older nobility. The General had boldly pleaded with the Emperor. "The whole world is surprised that such a wise and sensible Emperor as Jahangir should permit a woman to have so great an influence over him." Mahabat found the situation hard. Presently he found it intolerable. Nur Jahan was jealous of his prestige. She was planning his ruin.

Mahabat realised that his life and honour were at stake. He decided to play with fire. The Emperor was then on his way to Kabul, accompanied by Nur Jahan and his courtiers. He broke journey on the bank of the Jhelum. His army had already crossed over a bridge to the other bank. Only a few servants remained.

Mahabat Khan launched a surprise. He posted two thousand of his trusted Rajput horsemen at the head of the bridge with orders not to allow anyone to pass. Then he proceeded to the imperial camp. His soldiers occupied the royal apartments. The Emperor was virtually a prisoner, though he was treated with all respect.

The first round had been won. Mahabat now went to capture one who was greater than the Emperor,—the real power behind the throne. But the bird had flown! She had disguised herself and crossed the bridge accompanied only by a servant!

She summoned a council of high officials and nobles. "All this has happened through your neglect and stupid arrangements. What was beyond imagination has come to pass, and now you stand stricken with shame for your conduct before God and man." It was resolved to attack Mahabat Khan.

Meanwhile, the bridge had been burnt. The imperial forces advanced under the cloak of darkness led by the Queen herself, mounted on horseback. The river was in flood. Horsemen plunged into the swirling water, but were swept away. Some returned half-dead. Others left their mounts and swam to the opposite bank. But the Rajputs were watching. A number of the imperialists were killed ; the rest ran away.

But Nur Jahan could not bear to live separated from her husband. Besides, her power was gone. So she surrendered voluntarily to Mahabat Khan and was allowed to come back to the Emperor.

Mahabat thus won the second round. The greatest personages in the Empire were his captives. He was the virtual Dictator of Hindustan. The revolution—if one might call it so—was complete.

For a moment the great nobles were pleased with this state of affairs. They had hated to be ruled by a woman. But in a while they grew jealous of the influence of the Rajputs who had pushed Mahabat Khan to power. And all the while Nur

Jahan, intelligent, diplomatic, resourceful, was planning his downfall.

First, she tutored her husband and set him to win Mahabat's confidence. Jahangir played the double game successfully. He pretended that Mahabat had released him from his crafty wife's bondage. He even warned Mahabat against the Empress. He posed as a happy contented man. Mahabat was deceived. He reduced the number of Rajput palace guards.

Nur Jahan was, meanwhile, engaged in a conspiracy. She bribed extensively, made promises, used her great powers of persuasion.

One day, while travelling to Lahore, Jahangir escaped through Mahabat's circle of guards. The royalists rallied round him. At once Mahabat lost heart. Circumstances had raised him to an eminence he had never desired. Acting on an impulse of self-defence he had struck out in bold offensive and assumed a glittering mantle that pricked more than pleased.

Pursued by the imperial army, Mahabat fled into the hills of Mewar. Nur Jahan was Empress again, in deed as in name. But her rule ended in a year. Jahangir suddenly died. There was a brief struggle for succession. Nur Jahan's own candidate, Shahriyar, was defeated, imprisoned and blinded. Her bitter enemy, Shah Jahan, ascended the throne.

She passed her last days in complete retirement, wearing only white garments, always in sorrow, living a pleasureless life. Her daughter, the widow of Shahriyar, gave her company. Thus she lived for eighteen years. And after her death she was buried beside her husband, in a tomb she had built for herself during her days of supreme power.

Shah Jahan's "Dream in Marble"

Arjumand Banu was a niece of Nur Jahan, Jahangir's favourite wife. She received good education, and her extraordinary beauty as she grew into maidenhood became the talk of the town. Many a young *amir* of Agra was anxious to have her as his wife. But her father had planned to marry her to one next only to the all-highest. At the age of nineteen her hand was given to Prince Khurram, the heir-apparent, amid great pomp and splendour.

Like her celebrated aunt, Nur Jahan, Arjumand captured the heart of her husband, who, though hardly twenty-one, had already another wife. Arjumand Banu became an inseparable companion of the Prince, and shared his adversity during eight years of exile and wandering. When Prince Khurram ascended the throne, Arjumand Banu, better known by her other name Mumtaz Mahal ("The Crown of the Palace"), did not fade away behind the screens of harem life. She remained in her husbands' prosperity what she had been to him during his adversity: a keen sympathiser, an understanding friend, a helpful companion and adviser.

Two hours before sunrise the Emperor wakes from sleep. After toilet he tells his prayers, and

walks to the *jharokha* window overlooking the Jumna bank, where vast crowds are waiting to catch a glimpse of his face. Then he amuses himself by witnessing elephant fights. Morning has advanced. It is time for business. The Emperor goes to the Hall of Forty Pillars and holds a public *darbar*. At about 10 A.M. he goes to the Hall of Private Audience where despatches are submitted to him and answers drafted. Two hours later, His Majesty goes to the Royal Tower where none but the Princes and three or four officials are admitted, and confidential business is transacted.

At midday he is back in the harem. Mumtaj Mahal has been counting the hours. But she has not been idle. A sheaf of petitions have come from widows, orphans, parents who cannot marry off their daughters for want of money,—all seeking charity. Mumtaj Mahal has been studying the petitions. Her favourite lady-in-waiting, Sati-un-Nissa, has been assisting her. The Empress is moved to pity at the sight of misery. Seldom does a distressed person appeal to her without success. At noon, everyday, His Majesty returning from business takes a short siesta, and is then awakened by Mumtaj Mahal and asked to consider her report of the cases and to make decisions. Each day large sums of money as well as lands, garments and jewels are given away in charity. Mumtaj loves this work. It is her good fortune, she thinks, to be in a position to help those

who are in need. Many a time she pleads with the Emperor on behalf of officials who have incurred his displeasure. Once in a while, with tears in her eyes, she begs for the life of political offenders condemned to the executioner's axe.

Yet, she is not too soft-hearted. She can be roused into fury, as the Portuguese pirates of Bengal learn to their cost. Manoel Travers sails out of Hugli with his tall, bearded men seizes two of the Empress's slave-girls. Another Portuguese captures a Mughal lady of rank. Mumtaj Mahal vows vengeance. Her husband is moved by the gleam in her eye, the fire in her words. Orders are sent to the Bengal Government, who at once send a large force to attack Hugli, the main pirate settlement. The Portuguese offer strong resistance, but are smashed. So they live happily—Mumtaj Mahal and Shah Jahan. Shah Jahan consults his wife even on important affairs of State. She has custody of the royal seal. She receives a large allowance from her miserly husband, who hates to spend except on the construction of things of beauty such as the Peacock Throne. Out of her allowance she puts aside money as well as jewels and precious articles so that she may give them away at her son's marriage. Thus at the marriage of the Crown Prince, Dara Shuko, she gives away sixteen lakhs of rupees' worth of gifts.

She became the mother of fourteen children. six daughters and eight sons, among whom were

Dara Shuko, Shujah, Murad and Aurangzib. Strange to reflect that this gentle-hearted woman was Aurangzib's mother! The birth of her last child brought about a tragedy that darkened the life of Shah Jahan.

Mumtaj Mahal was dead in her thirty-seventh year!

For one full week the emperor did not appear at the *jharokha* window. He gave up all public business. He said that he wanted to renounce the world and become a fakir, and was prevented only by his regard for the sacred trust of empire. He gave up all luxuries, costly dresses, jewellery and perfumes, and prohibited music, dancing, merri-ment. The whole empire was in mourning for two years. "Life has no taste for me now," the Emperor cried. In a few months all his hair had become silver grey.

Something more was born on June 7, 1631, than a daughter that destroyed its mother. The Taj Mahal came to life on that day, conceived in a lover's misery, growing up to delight all the world with its dream beauty.

The idea was to build a monument of eternal memory. Mumtaj Mahal was dead: but she would live again. That is why the Taj Mahal is so full of womanly grace. E. B. Havell rightly says: "Those critics who have objected to the effeminacy of the architecture unconsciously pay the highest tribute to the genius of the builders. The Taj

Mahal was meant to be feminine. The whole conception and every line and detail of it express the intention of the designers. It is Mumtaz Mahal herself, radiant in her youthful beauty, who still lingers on the banks of the shining Jumna, at early morn, in the glowing midday sun, or in the silver moonlight. Or rather we should say, it conveys a more abstract thought ; it is India's noble tribute to the grace of India's womanhood—the Venus de Milo of the East."

It was not easy to give body to such a conception. All the resources of the mighty empire were brought to bear in fulfilment of the task. Twenty thousand men were employed on the building, and it took seventeen years to complete. Artisans were brought from many parts : chief masons from Baghdad ; dome builders from Samarkand ; inlay workers from Kanauj ; calligraphists from Shiraz.

The material came from every part of India and Central Asia : marble from Jaipur ; sandstone from Fatepur Sikri. The Punjab supplied jasper ; China, jade and crystal ; Tibet, turquoise ; Ceylon, lapis lazuli and sapphire ; Arabia, coral and cornelian ; Bundelkhand, diamonds ; Persia, onyx and amethyst. The expenditure amounted to over nine crores of rupees.

Shah Jahan convened a council of the empire's best architects to make a design for the proposed building. Drawings of the world's most beautiful buildings were submitted and discussed. Accord-

ing to a Spanish friar who visited Agra in 1640, when the Taj was under construction, the design of an Italian named Geronimo Veroneo was approved and he was appointed chief architect. The story has been accepted by a famous British historian, but it sounds untrue. It is improbable that Shah Jahan should have employed a European for the realization of his dream. He hated Jesuits, deprived them of their pensions, and destroyed churches. Mumtaj Mahal herself was a bitter enemy of Christians. Then, no other European records the fact, not even Peter Mundy who knew Veroneo personally. Against the Spanish friar's statement has to be considered that of Indian chroniclers all of whom mention the names of Ustad Isa of Shiraz and his son Muhammad Sharif as the designers-in-chief of the Taj Mahal.

But the idea and spirit of the great monument with its grace and rhythm were entirely Shah Jahan's own. It was indeed his "dream in marble."

Sir Edwin Arnold was moved to the following lines:

"Not architecture ; as all others are,
 But the proud passion of an emperor's love
 Wrought into living stone, which gleams and soars
 With body of beauty shrining soul and thought ;
 As when some face divinely fair unveils before
 our eyes—

Some woman beautiful unspeakably—

And the blood quickens, and the spirit leaps,
And will to worship bends the half-yielded knees
While breath forgets to breathe. So is the Taj!"

Rabindranath Tagore has a superb poem, *Taj Mahal*.

"You allowed your kingly power to vanish, Shah Jahan, but your wish was to make imperishable a tear-drop of love.

Time has no pity for the human heart, he laughs at its sad struggle to remember.

You allured him with beauty, made him captive, and crowned the formless death with fadeless form.

Though empires crumble to dust, and centuries are lost in shadows, the marble still sighs to the stars, 'I remember.'

'I remember'—but life forgets, for she has her call to the Endless : and she goes on her voyage unburdened, leaving her memories to the forlorn forms of beauty."

Durgavati

Ten miles from Jubbulpore the Narmada river is squeezed between two chains of white hills, oddly patterned, assorted apparently without plan and yet falling into symmetry and balance. Paddling down the deep canyon, one passes a boulder-scarred rock race at which the boatman points and says: "Rani Durgavati often came yonder and worshipped the Goddess Sati."

Durgavati, who ruled the Narmada Plateau in the sixteenth century, lives now in legend. Her beauty, her daring and her administrative skill created an impression that sank deep into the popular mind. Her name is still revered, and stories of her eventful life are often repeated. "She was highly renowned for her courage, ability, and liberality," the *Akbar-Nama* of Abul-Fazl records: "and by the exercise of these qualities she had brought the whole country under her rule." She was an excellent shot both with bow and musket and often went hunting. "When she heard of a tiger, she never rested till she had shot it."

Her father Salibahan came of a famous ruling dynasty. But he had fallen upon lean times, and was forced to give his girl in marriage to a Raja of the primitive Gond tribe. The Gond Raja died young, leaving a boy of four named Bir Narain,

and Durgavati assumed the government as Regent. She was an able ruler whose one thought was the welfare of her subjects. She built up an army of twenty thousand troops, with a thousand elephants. Neighbouring chiefs, who had hailed the accession of a woman as a god-send opportunity for themselves, were dragged into bitter humiliation. Working upon the excellent but disorganised material in her kingdom, welding the jungle tribes into a united mass, Durgavati carved out the powerful kingdom of Garha-Katanka.

Two eager eyes were fastened on this kingdom, the eyes of Akbar's general Asaf Khan who had already reduced the adjacent country of Panna. It had happened in the eighth year of Akbar's reign. A rebel Tartar had fled from Akbar's wrath and found refuge with Raja Ram Chand, the ruler of Panna. Asaf Khan sent an urgent message to the Raja asking him to surrender the rebel chief to Shahan Shah, the "Protector of the World", and also to become a subject of the "Asylum of the Universe."

But Ram Chand's generosity prevented him from betraying the refugee, and his pride would not let him accept submission. He prepared for war, and brought afield a vast army "like locusts and ants," but was routed. Akbar forgave him on condition that he became a vassal of the Empire.

Then it was Durgavati's turn. She would not pay tribute to Delhi. Tradition says that she

received from Akbar a little gold utensil signifying that women were good enough for housework, but not for managing state affairs. The Rani retaliated by sending the Emperor a gold *pinjan*, meaning that if it was her duty to do household work, then his duty was to clean cotton. The rejoinder could not have pleased Akbar! It is also said that Durgavati possessed a white elephant which Akbar coveted, but the Rani would not make a gift of her pet beast.

The Mughal general, however, kept up awhile the mask of friendship. He showed not the slightest desire for aggression. But he was preparing to stab the Queen on the back. He sent sharp-eyed spies who moved about in the guise of merchants, studying the geography of Garha-Katanka and collecting useful information.

Asaf Khan struck suddenly. Durgavati had disbanded her troops for the time and had only five hundred men with her. Taken unawares, she hurried away into the impenetrable jungles, and under the protection of Nature's cover she tried to muster her Gonds. Asaf Khan lost track of her.

But Durgavati grew impatient. With anger and pain she saw the Mughal plundering her peaceful villages. "How long shall we hide in the jungles?" she cried to her people, and decided to come out and face the invader with the five thousand men she had now assembled.

A stubborn fight followed. Mounted on an elephant, the Queen encouraged her troops with stirring words. Three hundred Mughals "obtained martyrdom" (as the chronicler puts it) and Durgavati pursued columns of fugitives. The battle was indecisive. At sunset, both the parties withdrew to rest for the night.

"Let us attack by night," Durgavati spoke to her officers. "See that hill yonder? Let us shift to its top. Or else Asaf will seize it for himself."

But her army chiefs disapproved of her plan. They counselled inaction until daybreak. When the sun rose, it was seen that Durgavati's prediction had come true. The Mughals had planted their artillery on the summit of the hill and fortified it.

In the game of quick movement for position the Rani had lost. Undaunted, she drew up her regiments, mounted her elephant and gave battle. "Such a conflict took place that, throwing away guns and arrows, the combatants seized each other's collars, and fought hand to hand" (writes Faizi Sirhindi in his *Akbar Nama*). The battle lasted until the third watch of the day, and thrice the imperial troops were repulsed with heavy losses. When the Mughal artillery thundered, devastating enemy ranks, Durgavati still rode at the head of her troops, encouraging them into a fierce onslaught. Presently her son, Bir Narain, reeled with a wound. The Queen had him carried away

to a place of safety. A number of troops went with the Prince, and her fighting lines were weakened. Yet she held her ground. But not for long. An arrow came flying and pierced her eye. Bravely she pulled it out with her own hand, but the pointed end broke and stuck to the wound, causing her immense pain.

Behind the Gond lines there was a river which had been dry before the battle had started, but was now in full flood. Retreat was thus impossible. The Gonds were caught as in a trap. Heavy artillery firing away in front, and an immense mass of water swirling behind. The mahout of Durgavati's mount begged permission to take her across. She scorned the idea and said, "I shall die, but not turn back." At this moment another arrow pierced her in the neck, and she extracted it as before. It was such a torture that she fainted.

The Gonds were reeling. The Prince Bir Narain wounded and in retreat; the Queen also wounded and unable to command; guns ceaselessly booming, and belching murder. When Durgavati came round, she found the lines falling to pieces. *Allah ho Akbar!* thundered the battle-cry of the Mughals. They had encircled the Gonds, and were closing up. Durgavati cast her eyes upon her men with deep affection. Her life-work had come to naught. Slavery faced the Gonds. A shiver of anguish went through the

noble Queen's heart, even more tormenting than the broken point of steel in the eye.

Then she spoke to her Minister, Adhar, who was mounted on the same elephant. "I have always placed trust and confidence in you against a day like this, that in the event of my defeat you will not let me fall into enemy hands." The faithful Adhar glanced at her in surprise and grasped the meaning of her words, but he shrank from the suggestion. Durgavati pitied him. She snatched a dagger from her *mahout* and plunged it into her heart. Thus on the brink of capture she escaped from Mughal hands and saved her honour. "Her end was as noble as her life had been useful," admits the Muslim chronicler. A little monument stands to-day on the spot where she is said to have stabbed herself.

EVENTS

British Invasion of Nepal

"Disputes exist between me and the English," the Raja of Nepal addressed his Chief Councillors. "The Governor-General has written to me that he has given orders to the Judge and Collector to establish their authority (in the disputed lands on the Gorakhpur frontier), and that he shall not think it necessary to repeat his intimation on that subject. How then is my Raj to exist? In my judgment an appeal should be made to arms. Do you deliberate, and give me a decided and united opinion."

General Bhim Sein Thapa replied first: "No one has yet been able to cope with the State of Nepal. The Chinese once made war upon us, but were reduced to seek peace. . . . We shall by our exertions be able to oppose the English. . . . and expel them. Our hills and fastnesses are formed by the hand of God, and are impregnable. I therefore recommend the prosecution of hostilities."

The other Chiefs then spoke. One or two advised friendly negotiation, and peace at a price. But the majority favoured war as the only way out of an intricate situation.

The Kingdom of Nepal skirted the northern frontier of British India from the Teesta river in the east to the Sutlej in the west. Half a century

before, the country had lain in strips of petty principalities ruled by hill Rajas, ignorant, self-centred, unable to combine for mutual defence. Like fragile reeds they bent before the storm of Gurkha ambition, and were lost, up-rooted. Prithwi Narayan's struggle to build up a powerful kingship on the prostrate bodies of his weak-kneed opponents extended over a decade. His troops carried all before them, even defeating the Nawab of Bengal who attempted interference. In 1768 the valley of Nepal was almost entirely under Prithwi Narayan's rule. His successors annexed some stretches of lowlands, pushing down to the boundaries of British territory.

Early in the nineteenth century, the border disputes assumed a serious turn. When the Marquis of Hastings came out as Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief, he decided to take action. His first step was to address a letter to the Raja of Nepal, asking him to evacuate the two districts which were the source of dispute: in case he did not comply within twenty-five days, the matter would be settled by force of arms.

The Raja of Nepal, supported by the advice of his Chiefs, decided on resistance, but he sent a reply to Lord Hastings with assurances of respect and intimations of his desire to keep peace. When the British troops came and took possession of the districts in question, the Gurkhas retreated

hastily. The British Magistrate established three police *thanas*, and then the troops withdrew.

The Gurkhas struck suddenly. They surrounded the *thanas* without warning and killed the police officers. It was a signal for war.

The Governor-General made his strategic plan. The attack was to be launched by four divisions from four different points. Thirty thousand troops were kept in readiness for the invasion. The task, it was thought, was simple. The Gurkhas could gather no more than twelve thousand men, ill-armed, ill-disciplined. And had not the East India Company crushed the power of enemies who, in strength, organisation and resources, were superior to the races of the Himalayan slope?

Major-General Gillespie was the first to penetrate into the hill frontier. Marching through the Keree Pass he reached a tableland, three-and-a-half miles from Dehra Dun. On a nook of hills stood the little fortress of Kulunga, surrounded by huge boulders that served as a protective wall, which again was screened by a dense forest of ancient Sal trees. The Gurkha Commander Balabhadra Singh was awaiting the British in this fortress of Nature with six hundred followers.

The British troops toiled uphill, and the siege started. The thunder of the British battery was returned by volleys of musket fire. The Gurkhas were rapidly thinned in the mean little fort affording inadequate cover; yet they would not think

of surrender. General Gillespie, filled with indignant surprise, determined to carry the place by storm, and led the 53rd Regiment and the Dragoons towards the gates of the fort. When the British soldiers were within range of the enemy's matchlock, they hung back. In vain the General went up in advance of his line, waving his sword, and ordered his men to follow. A shot rang out. General Gillespie lay dead, a bullet through his heart.

The divisions retreated and waited for reinforcements. These arrived in a month, and a second attack was made. This, too, was repulsed. Balabhadra Singh was working wonders! With a few hundred ill-armed troops he was holding back an entire division. Even women hurled stones at the enemy. The British guns had made breeches on all sides of the fort. Wounded men lay groaning. But, worst of all, the water-supply had run short. The only supply was from waterfalls outside the fort, and these the British had cut off. At last the thirst became unbearable. One night the gates flung quietly open, and out came Balabhadra Singh with his band of seventy (the remnants of his 600), marching in measured military gait. They had swords in hand, the *kukri* in their belts, and the *chakra* (wheel) on their head-dress. Slipping past by the British outposts they vanished among the hills, leaving no trace.

During this campaign the British realised that

been charged by the enemy, sword in hand, and driven for miles. . . . In a late instance of complete rout, we lost muskets by a greater number than there were killed, wounded and missing. . . . We have had numbers on our side, and skill and bravery on the side of our enemy. We have had the inhabitants of the country disposed to favour us, and yet overawed, notwithstanding our presence and partial success, by the character of our enemy."

But one lesson the British had learnt at Kulunga. That fort had fallen only when the water-supply had run short. Advancing on Jaithuk, the British General discovered that the Gurkhas depended for water on wells outside the fort. He planned to seize the wells. But the enemy hit hard. The storming party came flying back, the Gurkhas close at their heels, leaving 500 of their number dead or dying on the battlefield.

The Gurkhas had struck their enemy with terror, and shattered their *morale*. This was distressingly revealed at Chamalgarh. A band of two hundred Gurkhas, surrounded by 2,000 irregulars, resolved to die fighting. But there was no battle. The sight of the stern, death-defying hillmen frightened the Company's troops and they fled away in haste.

The year 1814 had nothing to record but a long series of disasters. One commander alone,

General Ochterlony of the fourth army, yet held his ground by sheer caution, building roads and bringing up heavy artillery. He was, according to a report, "steadily pursuing his plan by slow and secure manoeuvres, but had yet gained no brilliant advantage over his equally cautious antagonist." Alone with his division he plodded on, suffering minor defeats. But he did not depend on military prowess alone. As British Resident at Delhi, Ochterlony had learnt the art of diplomacy. He now used it.

The net of intrigue was cast over the hills, and dragged in the feudatory chiefs of Hindur, Bilaspur and Sikkim. Lured by British promises, they turned against their overlord of Nepal.

The Marquis of Hastings was straining to increase the strength of the British divisions. All military stations in Bengal and Bihar had been drained of troops so that reinforcements might be sent. In numbers, the British armies were incomparably superior to their adversary. The Gurkhas were fighting against heavy odds. Their finances had been over-strained by the struggle. And to crown all, there was treachery at home.

The very existence of British India was endangered by this war with Nepal. A few more defeats, and British prestige would have gone down. The Mahrattas were biding their time. Ranjit Singh was watching cautiously with his single eye. A great conflagration might break out

at any moment. But, Nepal, single-handed, could not hold on any more. The war had become one of continuance, and length of the purse. The Raja had to ask for peace. He ceded all the territory under British occupation, and accepted a Resident at Katmandu. Thus British India gained some of its best hill stations, including Darjeeling and Simla.

Suppression of the Thugs

“O Kali! Mother of the World! whose votaries we are, receive this thy servant. Give him thy protection, and give us an omen that will assure us of thy consent.”

A young Thug was being initiated into his profession. Wearing unbleached new clothes he faced the leaders of the gang. In silence they awaited their prayer to be answered. Suddenly an owl hooted overhead from a tree. At once the Thugs burst forth hilariously: “*Jai Kali!* the omen is favourable. The acceptance is complete.”

The initiate was handed a pickaxe, the symbol of the sect, and believed to be a replica of Kali's teeth. Then he repeated a horrible oath on dictation, in the name of the goddess of whom he was now a devotee, vowing to destroy every human being who fell into his power. *Koran* in hand, he repeated the same oath. Finally, he partook of consecrated sugar and was transformed into a Thug. If henceforth he broke his oath, he would be punished by Kali with a horrible death. His head would be twisted round until his face turned towards his back, and he would writhe in torment until he died. But so long as he kept his vows, wielding the knife that was a rib of the goddess and the strangling cloth (either yellow or white—Kali's

favourite colours) that was the hem of her garment, he would be assured of protection.

The Thugs formed a vast secret society of murderers, hereditary, comprising both Hindu and Muslim. It is strange how the two religions met under the canopy of crime! Thugs of either creed worshipped Kali in the Hindu way. (But then it was a perversion of Hindu rites.) The origin of the murder guild is lost in the mist of the Middle Ages, but it is known to have existed in the fourteenth century when a thousand Thugs were caught near Delhi. Thuggee burst up all over Indian society like a horrid rash after the anarchy produced by Mongol and Tartar invasions.

Once in a while the gangs were captured by Indian princes and destroyed. But these were supposed to be ordinary robbers. Little was known of the Thugs as a body of vile criminals operating all over India and united by common ceremonies, secretiveness, method, framework of organisation, and a firm belief in their divine origin. Muslim chronicles bear scanty reference to Thugs. Even the British authorities knew nothing of these hereditary murderers until after the conquest of Seringapatam (1799) when a hundred were caught near Bangalore. Then in 1810, a number of sepoy disappeared while on the road, and this led the Commander-in-Chief to issue a Proclamation warning the soldiers against wayside robbers. Two years after, a British

Lieutenant was murdered. An expedition was rushed to the villages where the assassins were known to live. Arms clashed and the places were occupied after a struggle. It was then discovered that over nine hundred Thugs had their homes in these villages alone.

At last the Thugs had become news. They were discussed with interest and curiosity. Gangs were arrested and punished. But nothing was yet done to destroy the far-flung organisation. The loss of individuals here and there did little damage to the system as a whole. So it happened that the Thugs became bolder, and their murder trade was more profitable than ever.

Some of the captives bought their lives by turning approvers. The disclosures made by them, specially by Feringhee, a notorious leader, struck the Government with horror. Lord William Bentinck was deeply moved. The destruction of Thugs now became one of the aims of his policy.

Colonel Sleeman, an able British officer, was deputed for the task. From his outpost at Jubbulpore he organised a tremendous drive against these fiendish enemies of society. Under him the police force became inspired with one noble purpose. On their success depended the lives of tens of thousands, and the happiness of countless more. The suppression of a secret society that had led its dark ugly existence for five centuries had at last started!

The first step was to bribe away one or more informers from every gang. A map of crime was drawn up. At first it was limited to the Nermada plateau. But quickly its area widened. Thugs were brought in from distant parts, and they gave information of gangs operating farther up. At last it was seen that the system prevailed over the whole of India, from the foothills of the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, and from Assam to the Punjab.

The discovery of this destructive system that had silently worked over the whole country, taking its annual toll of lives, was received with incredulity. Magistrates refused to believe that the murder bands had been working in their districts without their knowledge. But the evidence of dead bodies could not be ignored. Thug informers took the police to places where corpses lay buried in various stages of decomposition. Colonel Sleeman was himself staggered by the secrecy with which the murders had been committed.

The mystery in which the Thugs surrounded themselves were partly brought about by their severe oath of secrecy, and partly by their screen of peaceful pursuit. They went about in little groups, as inoffensive travellers. Often they took children with them to prevent suspicion being roused. On the road they made friends with fellow-travellers and sought their company under the plea of mutual safety or society ; or else they

followed the travellers at a little distance. Sometimes they went with their intended victims for days together, sleeping in the same inns, visiting temples, building up the semblance of a friendship. When the opportunity came, they wielded the instrument of death. That instrument was simply a short piece of rope, or a turban or waist-band. The strip of cloth was doubled to the length of two feet, a knot was formed at the double extremity and a slip-knot tied about eighteen inches from it. The loop was suddenly thrown round the victim's neck and he was kicked to the ground. The slip-knot was then loosened by the Thug who made another fold of it round the neck, on which he planted his foot and drew the cloth tighter. The working of the noose was aided by kicks to produce vital injury. The victim had no chance to resist.

Two Thugs were usually employed to murder one man. Some Thugs prided themselves on their ability to kill a victim single-handed—a high distinction. A Thug who had dragged a rider from his horse and strangled him received an honour that ennobled his family in the eyes of his fellows for many generations.

Elaborate precautions were taken before the murder. Some men of the gang were sent in advance, others left behind to keep watch and give warning. If people appeared unexpectedly before the victim was buried, the

cunning Thugs used some artifice to prevent discovery: one of the watchers, for example, would fall down, writhing with pain, and beg the help of the intruders, thus detaining them from the scene of murder.

Usually the murders were committed in a jungle or in a sandy place. The victims were buried, leaving no trace. "Dead men tell no tales," was the Thuggee precept. It was essential for the secret society that their bloodless murders should be screened with a veil of mystery.

Before burial, however, the dead body was subjected to outrages. Long deep gashes were cut in various parts. Limbs were disjointed and the figure was distorted into unusual positions. The task of mangling was assigned to one particular person in the gang.

The Thugs drew their strength and ferocity from religious perversion. Their victims were offerings to Kali. She, their protector, was always with them, helping them to achieve success. Her warnings were communicated through animals and birds, and the Thugs never moved without consulting the omens. Extraordinary deference was paid to the ass whose omen was the most important of all. The saying ran: "the ass is equal to a hundred birds." At the start of an expedition, if the Thugs heard an ass's bray first on the left, then on the right, they assumed that nothing on earth could prevent their success.

If on halting at any stage the bray was heard on the left, the party must leave the place and hurry on at once. A bray from an ass approaching from the front signalled danger. Jackals were next in importance to the ass. "A jackal crossing from right to left brings gold." Then came the augury of the deer, the wolf and the birds.

But Sleeman, ruthlessly efficient, brought about the end of it all. Between 1831 and 1837 more than three thousand Thugs were captured. Of these, some were hanged, many transported, and the others were either imprisoned, or else they turned approvers.

The Indian National Congress

"All the members of the Government with whom I have had the privilege of conversing have deeply lamented the want of the means, on the part of the people, of conveying their sentiments upon Government measures. . . . You offer no advice, you threaten no opposition, you recommend no modification."

One afternoon in 1842, George Thompson, an orator from England, spoke thus to a gathering of Calcutta intellectuals. His voice was persuasive. He knew the power of a moving simile, a swift gesture. "Our policy in this country has not only been selfish, but blind," he frankly admitted. "Combine, speak with one voice," he thundered.

George Thompson's speeches were a mass of words. He never proposed any far-reaching structural changes in the administration. His success lay in rousing enthusiasm and directing it into political channels. The outcome was the British India Society, the first political organisation in the country. The society never became a powerful body. Soon after its birth it began to languish.

Its successor, the British Indian Association, formed in 1851, was composed not of intellectual visionaries, but of the landed aristocracy. That explains its rise to power. The middle classes were

yet too small and resourceless to lead a political movement. The Association always remembered its own class interests, and worked to win political privileges for the landlords, though its avowed aim was "to advance the common interests of Great Britain and India, and ameliorate the condition of the native inhabitants of the country". Unlike the intellectuals who quoted Bentham and Paine, they had no taste for far-reaching changes, nor were they in any sense the apostles of democracy. When they talked of the rights of the people, they meant the rights of their own class. The first President of the British Indian Association was also the founder and leader of the reactionary *Dharma Sabha* which had fought Bentinck's measure for the abolition of *suttee*. But that did not prevent Devendra Nath Tagore, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj and an eminent reformer, from joining the Association as its Honorary Secretary.

Organised on modern lines, led by an executive committee, the Association sought for an all-India basis, and succeeded in founding branch societies in Madras and Oudh. It held regular meetings, discussed legislative proposals and made its own reform plans. It appointed agents in London and submitted to Parliament petition after petition. Unrecognised by the Government at the beginning, it had its own nominees in the Legislative Council of India at the end.

Yet this Association was doomed, owing to its lack of idealism and its narrow purpose. All these years the middle classes were developing in numbers and strength. Their dominant sections were the lawyers and the writers: the writers spread new ideas, the lawyers built a machine. The Indian Association was the machine, owing its origin to a wide support which the landed aristocrats had never sought. Indeed, the progressive and dynamic middle classes were far better equipped than the aristocracy to form a political union of the different provinces and create a new national life.

This was in 1876. The Indian Association marked a new departure in organisation as well as method. It attached much more importance to political agitation than to the despatch of petitions. And it did not base itself on the strength of a single province: inspired by the ideas of Mazzini, the apostle of unity, it tried with some success, to become the rallying point of all India. Further, it tried to break the barriers of race and religion, and to draw in not only Hindus and Sikhs, but also Muslims.

The experiment started well. But the purpose of the Indian Association remained unfulfilled, to be handed on, later, to the Indian National Congress. In 1876 Indian society was still unprepared for far-reaching political developments, and was much more concerned with intellectual enquiry

than with concrete political proposals. Between the years 1876 and 1885 great events took place.

The Delhi Durbar of 1877 was summoned at a time when a cyclone had destroyed a quarter of a million lives in Bengal, and a terrible famine in the South was threatening millions with starvation. The *Bengalce* described the affair as "a gigantic folly", and said: "If the Imperial pageant at Delhi takes place when the country is mourning, the object of the Assemblage will be completely frustrated, and the whole thing will leave a very unpleasant impression on the popular mind." "Nero fiddles while Rome burns," remarked another journal voicing the opinion of the educated community. While creating bitterness the Durbar taught a lesson. Surendra Nath Banerjee attended the gathering as a representative of *The Hindoo Patriot*, and a number of other rising Indian leaders witnessed the brilliant function. The question occurred to these men that if the nobles of the land could be made to rally round the Viceroy, why could not the people be brought together under the banner of a political party, in order to restrain despotic rule by constitutional means?

Then, again, the heat engendered by the Vernacular Press Act of 1878 was quickly transformed into creative energy. The Ilbert Bill controversy produced a similar result. Never before had the value of propaganda been so forcefully vindicated. And never before had the need of political insti-

tutions made itself so deeply felt. In 1883, a political Conference was held in Calcutta, and was followed next year by the "International Exhibition". In Madras, the "Mahajana Sabha" had been formed, and here also a Provincial Conference sat amidst great enthusiasm.

In 1883, Surendra Nath Banerji was arrested as editor of the *Bengalee* on a charge of contempt of the High Court. The Chief Justice sentenced him to prison for two months. An Indian Judge on the bench gave a dissenting judgment, stating that the infliction of a fine was sufficient. The sentence was received with indignation by the thousands gathered on the streets, who vented their anger by smashing windows and pelting the police with stones.

The news of Banerji's imprisonment created a great impression throughout India. The demonstrations in Calcutta were so large that the crowds could not be accommodated in any hall, and the meetings had to be held in the *maidan*. Thus began the open-air political meetings, so common in India to-day.

The "ill-starred measures of reaction," wrote Sir William Wedderburn, "combined with Russian methods of police repression, brought India . . . within measurable distance of a revolutionary outbreak." That perhaps was exaggeration. But there were seven volumes of reports collected by Government agents showing that a deep unrest

had taken root and might vent itself in "acts of lawlessness which might any day develop into a National Revolt."

While the objective forces thus matured, a Scotsman sat on the hills of Simla, watching with keen anxiety the strengthening of Indian political currents. Allan Hume, a Secretary to the Government of India, had noticed the "dangerous" clouds that had appeared on the horizon, had seen them burst and create new streams, and the question had rung in his ears: What is going to happen next? He had pondered, and found an answer, clear and terrifying. From that day Allan Hume began to make his plans. He waited for his retirement from service before he took action. On March 1, 1883, he started his work by addressing a manifesto to the graduates of Calcutta University, asking them, as "the most highly educated of the nation", to scorn personal ease and struggle for a greater freedom and for a larger share in the management of their own country's affairs. "If only fifty men, good and true, can be found to join as founders, the thing can be established and the further development will be comparatively easy." He went on to describe the framework of a proposed organisation, to be known as the Indian National Union.

At last the idea of Mazzini so often preached from the platform and the press had transformed itself from a gaseous into a solid, palpable form. Unity and organisation were the cry of the day.

The existing political bodies were insufficient instruments. The Bengal leaders talked of an all-India society. So did seventeen men in Madras who assembled privately after a meeting of the Theosophical Convention. Hume's appeal therefore had an immense effect. At one stroke he made his way into the hearts of educated Indians.

Some concluding remarks of his historic letter may well be quoted: "And, if even the leaders of thought are all either such poor creatures, or so selfishly wedded to personal concerns that they dare not strike a blow for their country's sake, then justly and rightly are they kept down and trampled on, for they deserve nothing better. Every nation secures precisely as good a government as it merits. If you, the picked men, the most highly educated of the nation, cannot, scorning personal ease and selfish objects, make a resolute struggle to secure greater freedom for yourselves and your country, a more impartial administration, a larger share in the management of your own affairs, then we, your friends, are wrong and our adversaries right; then are Lord Ripon's noble aspirations for your good fruitless and visionary; then, at present at any rate, all hopes of progress are at an end, and India truly neither desires nor deserves any better government than she enjoys."

The Indian National Union was formed, with Hume as General Secretary and it was arranged that a Conference would meet at Poona. In the

meantime a preliminary Report was issued to members, containing suggestions which were claimed to be the result of discussions with "all the most eminent and earnest politicians of this Empire." The most important of these suggestions was that the "key-note" of the new institution should be "unswerving loyalty to the British Crown." The "continued affiliation of India to Great Britain, at any rate for a period far exceeding the range of any practical political forecast," was said to be essential.

The self-imposed task of Allan Hume was to curb the growth of unrest, and to divert the dangerous currents of Indian political consciousness into peaceful channels. It appears that while initiating the new national movement he was disposed to turn the reforming passions to the social side. But it was apparently on Lord Dufferin's advice that he took up the work of political organisation from the beginning. Hume also desired that the Conference of the new association should be presided over by the Governor of Bombay, in order that a chain of friendship might bind the Indian politicians to official classes. Dufferin welcomed the proposal, as showing the desire of the National Union to work in complete harmony with the Government, but he considered that difficulties would arise if a high official presided over such an assembly. This idea was therefore dropped.

The majority of the members of the new assemblage disliked its name, and re-christened it the Indian National Congress. The outbreak of cholera at Poona prevented the Congress from holding its first session there in accordance with plan. Instead, it met at Bombay.

The sitting started at noon on December 28, 1885. The first speaker was Hume, who proposed the election of the first president, W. C. Bonnerjee. There were seventy-two delegates present and a number of distinguished official and non-official visitors.

The political drama which had begun after the Mutiny moved with slow action during the sixties, only gathering speed and complexity after 1872, and reaching its climax in the tempest raised by the Ilbert Bill. The Indian National Congress was in fact an anti-climax, but a most significant one. It indicated above all the increased solidarity, the united front of the middle-classes of Bengal and Bombay, Madras and the Punjab. These classes had at last found a common laboratory, as it were, in which to develop their political ideas, and a common platform from which to preach them. And it is essential to remember that the middle classes held political ideas far in advance of those of the aristocrats. They believed, for example, in the wider application of the principles of democracy, and equality of opportunity. They wanted to draw out the people from their age-old

shell of apathy, so that these might form a vast mass round the central nucleus of the educated community. They were in a mood for bold experiments. So, after the December days of 1885, the question began to loom large: would the middle classes succeed in giving to politics what they had been giving to the press and to literature—a continuous infusion of new blood?